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editorial

The naming of hate

Prince Harry's open use of an overtly racist word has put the "political correctness gone mad" lobby into attack mode. One ex-soldier speaking on the radio contended that the attitudes of those of us who object to such things "ruins people's lives". What? Why? How?

Surely it's the use of racist, sexist, homophobic and disabled terms which ruins lives. They are manifestations of hate; an assertion, from one group to another of inferiority. They encapsulate the views that what people are makes them worth less. So their use in other contexts where, it's argued, they don't necessarily carry the same amount of vitriol, remains inappropriate because it legitimises and institutionalises them.

In the case of the word used by Prince Harry, the evidence is incontrovertible. "Paki bashing" was the targeting for violence by gangs of white skinheads of Asians in Britain.

In the same way, disabled people who experience hate crime often report the use of derogatory disabled words before and during attacks – assuming they live to tell the tale, not all of them do. People who

are tipped from their wheelchairs may have the action reinforced by being called "fucking cripple". Action and speech equal attitude.

"Spastic" attained more universal status as an insult because it passed into more generic usage in the playground, the workplace and the pub.

Disabled people who experience hate crime often report the use of derogatory disabled words before and during attacks

There's also the question of power and where it lies. Not just in the obvious example of a prince referring to someone of less elevated status. The use of many racist words goes back to the time of empire when words were coined in the dominant culture and used with reference to those over whom power was exercised.

Similarly, we as disabled people subject to abuse can not simply accept it as part of life. To do so is to relinquish what little power we have.

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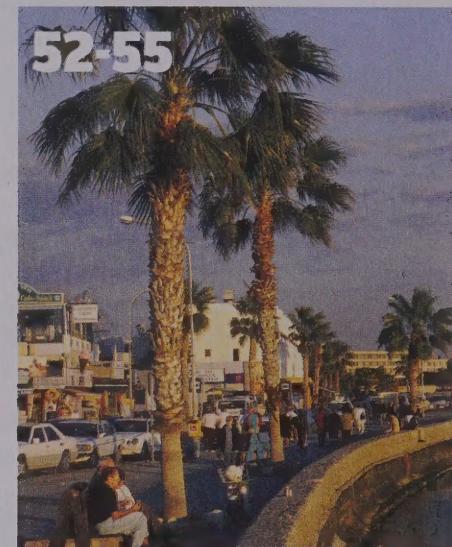
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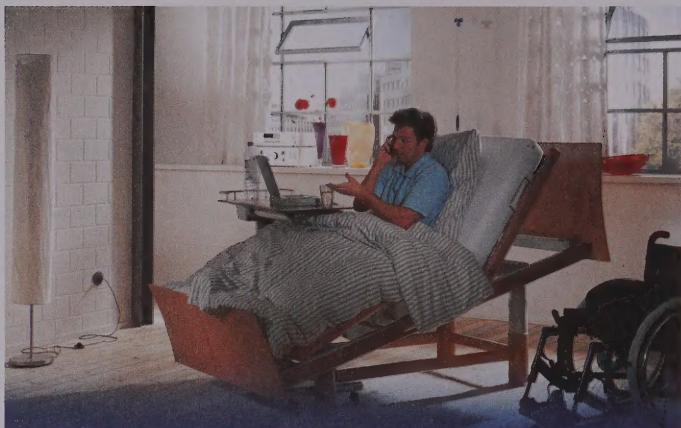


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newsview



Getting through the credit crunch: Paul Smith of the Spinal Injuries Association; Liz Sayce of RADAR; Alice Maynard of Scope

Charities feel the chill

Sunil Peck

Disability charities are surviving the economic downturn, just, but as the recession deepens chiefs can not rule out some going to the wall.

Paul Smith, executive director of the Spinal Injuries Association (SIA), says that his charity has seen a drop in income. As a result, the charity is consolidating its core services and has put on hold plans to develop its services, and is focussing on laying on more events in an effort to generate more funds.

"I would not want to say

that everything is rosy, but if we continue as we are, we should come out fine on the other side. A lot of our donors in the fields of care and disabled people's products and the legal profession are giving us more than they otherwise would."

Smith says that he is hopeful rather than fearful about the future. He described the SIA as being like a community which he hoped would rally round during the recession.

Dr Alice Maynard, chair of Scope, says that the charity is suffering more than some disability charities because of a lack of reserves. The

charity has announced a series of redundancies which she says were regrettable but are necessary measures to counter declining income and balance the books.

Liz Sayce, chief executive of RADAR, warns that smaller grassroots charities are more vulnerable.

"Organisations that have shared their concerns with us include access groups, centres for independent living and disability coalition organisations that have either missed out on contracts that have gone to larger organisations or who are seeing a decline in

donations and corporate sponsorship."

Sayce says that the government needs to do more to ensure that user-led organisations do not lose out to larger charities when support services are commissioned.

Ralph Michell, head of policy at the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO), says that the coming months would be "tough" for the third sector. He feels that the private sector and government have a role to play to support charities during difficult times. But he adds: "We do expect charities to go bust, and there is no reason why they should not be disability charities."

My name is Awa.

Awa is ten years old and is looking for a new family. Awa is a very happy child, with a great sense of humour and as you can see, she has a beautiful smile. Popular, both at school and church, Awa loves mixing with other children.

Awa is a bright girl despite having difficulty with her speech. This is due to her physical condition, cerebral palsy, which affects her balance and movements, and walking long distances can be a little difficult for her. But she is having regular physiotherapy which has helped enormously with the stiffness in her joints.

Even with her disability, Awa tries at all times to be independent. What she cannot express in words, she manages to express in other ways. Awa loves singing and watching her favourite programmes on tv. She also enjoys riding her bike.

Awa's ethnicity is African (Gambian) and we are looking for either a single or two parent family, who can offer Awa a permanent home and who will reflect or promote Awa's cultural identity and heritage. A family who can support Awa with her long term physical needs, so that she can develop the skills needed to become an independent adult.



If you would like to find out more about offering Awa a permanent, loving home, please contact Lilian Oladimeji, Newham Fostering and Adoption Service on 020 8430 4636 or email lilian.oladimeji@newham.gov.uk

My name is Jamie.

Jamie is six years old and is also looking for a new family. He is a very friendly and sociable child who loves going to school. Jamie enjoys helping around the house and his passion is horse riding. His favourite tv programme is Bob the Builder. He loves being neat and tidy. He has been described as a proper little chatterbox and delights in meeting people.

Jamie has some difficulties with his speech and learning, but does understand everything that is said to him and is receiving therapy to help with this. Jamie has dyspraxia, which means he struggles a little with jumping but this is not obvious.

Jamie's ethnicity is white British and we are looking for an adoptive single or two parent family who can give him the love and attention that he needs. We think he would ideally fit into a family where he is the youngest child.



If you would like to find out more about adopting Jamie, please contact Lucy Macharia, Newham Fostering and Adoption Service on 020 8430 4919 or email lucy.macharia@newham.gov.uk



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Convention delay 'alienates' disabled people

Sunil Peck

The government was rebuked for its delay in ratifying a United Nations convention promoting the rights of disabled people.

The Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, made up of MPs and peers, criticised the government for an "unacceptable" lack of transparency in its approach to ratifying the convention. It said the government had "alienated" disabled people and their organisations.

Dr Alice Maynard, Chair of disability charity Scope, said: "The government has been dragging its feet on this treaty, which is of huge importance for disabled people."

Richard Rieser (pictured, above), of the UN Convention Campaign Coalition, said that the coalition's priority was for the convention to be ratified with no opt-outs.

"One of the things the government hides behind is that it is waiting for Europe to ratify. Yet the German parliament has ratified it without reservation and so has Sweden. There is every chance the French will ratify it next month and Italy won't be far behind, so the big countries in Europe are not waiting for general agreement in Europe."

The Joint Committee welcomed the government's pledge to ratify by spring 2009 but said that it would be "extremely disappointed" if the convention was ratified without disabled people being consulted over opt-outs.

Jonathan Shaw, Minister for Disabled People, said: "The government takes equality seriously. That's why we are committed to ratification of the convention and our ambition is to do so in the spring."

• See *Disability Rights*, page 19.



Veteran campaigner Ken Davis dies



Paul Carter

The disability movement is mourning the death of Ken Davis, the popular disability campaigner and activist who died at the end of December.

In 1961, Mr Davis, a

former miner, sustained a spinal cord injury from a diving accident while doing national service with the RAF in Aden.

In 1972, along with other disabled people, he formed the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), a small group of disability activists that rejected the then orthodox personal tragedy view of disability in favour of a more political account, now known as the social model of disability.

Along with his wife Maggie, Mr Davis was a pioneer of the independent

living movement.

Together the couple went on to establish several co-operative ventures where disabled and non-disabled people worked together to establish community care and mutual support.

In 1981 Mr Davis also founded the first Coalition of Disabled People in Derbyshire and put pressure on the local authority to support the country's first Centre for Integrated Living, which opened in 1985.

He also played a key role in the establishment of the British Council of Disabled People.



Bus bans activist

Cathy Reay

An electric wheelchair-user was denied the right to get on a bus because the driver feared her chair might "blow up".

Elaine Powell, a disability campaigner from Denbigh in North

Wales, planned to take the Arriva Cymru bus to Rhyl with her son last December but was stopped by the driver.

"The driver said that when he was in training, he'd been told he wasn't allowed to let motorised chairs on buses because there was a danger

their batteries could blow up," said Ms Powell.

As other passengers tried to help her, Ms Powell said that the driver remained unwilling to let her on and shut the bus doors to block her from talking to him.

"I could see one of the other passengers saying to the driver 'I don't think this is on' and he just ignored her. I tried to ask him for his

licence but he drove off." Ms Powell boarded the next bus without any problem.

An Arriva North West and Wales spokesman said: "We apologise for the distress that this incident caused Ms Powell and are investigating the matter fully with the driver concerned."

Ms Powell, a former trustee of the Denbighshire Disability Forum, worked with Arriva Cymru five years ago to make local transport more accessible. She said she was disappointed that bad attitudes still persisted and didn't accept the apology. She said she wants to investigate the drivers' training so that such events don't recur.

Tory report highlights mental health concerns

Cathy Reay

Mixed-sex NHS mental health wards still exist, despite a government promise that they would be abolished, according to an Opposition report.

The Conservative Party claimed that much more needs to be done to eliminate mixed-sex wards and washing facilities.

In a study carried out on

55 mental health trusts (79 per cent of the total number), the audit found that eight per cent of patients were in wards segregated only by curtains and that 84 per cent of mental health trusts put patients in shared rooms.

It also found that 29 per cent of mental health trusts do not provide segregated washing facilities and that a quarter do not provide segregated toilets.

Over an 11-month period, from October 2007 to September 2008, the 55 mental health trusts received 135 complaints about privacy and dignity.

Shadow Health Secretary Andrew Lansley said: "We have set out clear plans to double the number of single rooms in NHS hospitals, which will allow us finally to end the scandal of mixed sex wards and allow NHS staff to treat patients with the respect

and dignity they deserve."

A Department of Health spokesman said: "We are reducing mixed-sex accommodation to an absolute minimum and have made significant progress [but] there will be some instances where urgent medical care must take precedence over total gender segregation. The NHS will not turn patients away because the 'right sex' bed is not immediately available."

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campaigns

Accentuate the positive

People increasingly rely on the information they get from media sources about hate and violent crime. The issue, asks **Stephen Brooks**, is has the media's continual and intense sensationalising contributed to an increased fear of hate crime?

Following the positive outcomes of recent statements and conferences about hate crime we now need to look at the way the media portray such crimes and how their portrayals possibly add to citizens' fears.

An increase of people coming forward to report hate crime should be seen as a good news story, but the headlines don't reflect this. A South of England newspaper reported a police inspector saying: "The figures...are a positive indication of the huge amount of work the force has been undertaking to encourage our communities to come forward..." but the headline read: "Hate crime statistics make grim reading", entirely missing the point!

News media, movies and television shows can inflame the fear of crime in people by depicting real incidents of such crimes in graphic detail. A headline from a north of England journal in October 2008 read: "Gangs of Asian



youths terrorise pensioners and try to pick a fight with a man in a wheelchair." Neil Crowther of the EHRC said of this piece: "What I think is interesting is the complex nature of what is going on there – intergenerational relations, anti-social behaviour, race relations, hostility towards a disabled person, people exploiting the vulnerable situation of

increase the confidence of minority groups in reporting hate crime. An example of how this works was seen in a December story in a Thames valley evening paper which had the headline: "Couple urge other hate crime sufferers to speak out after their neighbour is convicted of harassment."

The story goes on to give details of the sentence given to the offender and says: "After the case his victims told of their nightmare and urged other hate crime sufferers to speak out. The victim said: 'I would like to thank the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. People should not have to put up with harassment, whether it is racial or homophobic or anything. I would urge anyone in that situation to report it. I believe this case shows that something can be done about it.'"

→ Have your say

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- phone us 020 7619 7323

Your country needs **you**



Scottish disabled MP **Anne Begg** (pictured, above) says politics needs more disabled people

Politics! That's not for me.

How often have you heard this? Well if it's not for you, who is it for? If elected politicians aren't like you, then how can they possibly make the best decisions on a whole range of issues which will affect how you are able to lead your life?

It is generally accepted that if Parliament is to be representative of society at large then it needs to have more disabled people as members. At the moment it is impossible to say exactly

how many disabled people are MPs as not all have declared their disability, particularly if they have a mental health disorder. This was not an option open to me as it is pretty obvious that I'm disabled – the wheelchair gives it away! So when I did decide to run for Parliament, I answered the "how will she manage" question at my selection meeting even though it wasn't asked. I knew that people would be thinking it even though their political correctness wouldn't allow them to

articulate their concerns.

But, for most MPs, election to Parliament marks the end of a political journey, not the beginning.

I needed some persuading that it wasn't an "old boys' club", an alien environment for a teacher from a working class background who had lived in the North-East of Scotland all her life.

I'm often asked for advice on how to become an MP from people in their early 20s. I tell them to get a real job for 20 years, make politics and community activity their hobby, and by then they may have picked up the necessary qualities and experience for becoming a prospective MP.

For most MPs, election to Parliament marks the end of a political journey, not the beginning

That doesn't mean that we need to wait another 20 years for more disabled people to start seeking

selection. There are hundreds of disabled people up and down the country who have been doing just this for the past two decades, it's just that they don't necessarily realise that they already have a huge amount of "relevant" experience for a full time life in politics.

So if you are already an active member of a disabled group, a community council, a school board, a residents' association, a Trade Union; or are the kind of person who, instead of moaning about an injustice or shouting at the TV, actually takes some action to do something about it, then you may already have the necessary attributes to be a politician.

While there may be strong competition for the MP's job, in many areas it is easier to be selected for a Council election.

I've loved my time in Parliament and get a huge amount of satisfaction helping individual constituents. Why don't you think about it?

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media watch

Getting your kit off on TV

Emma Bowler

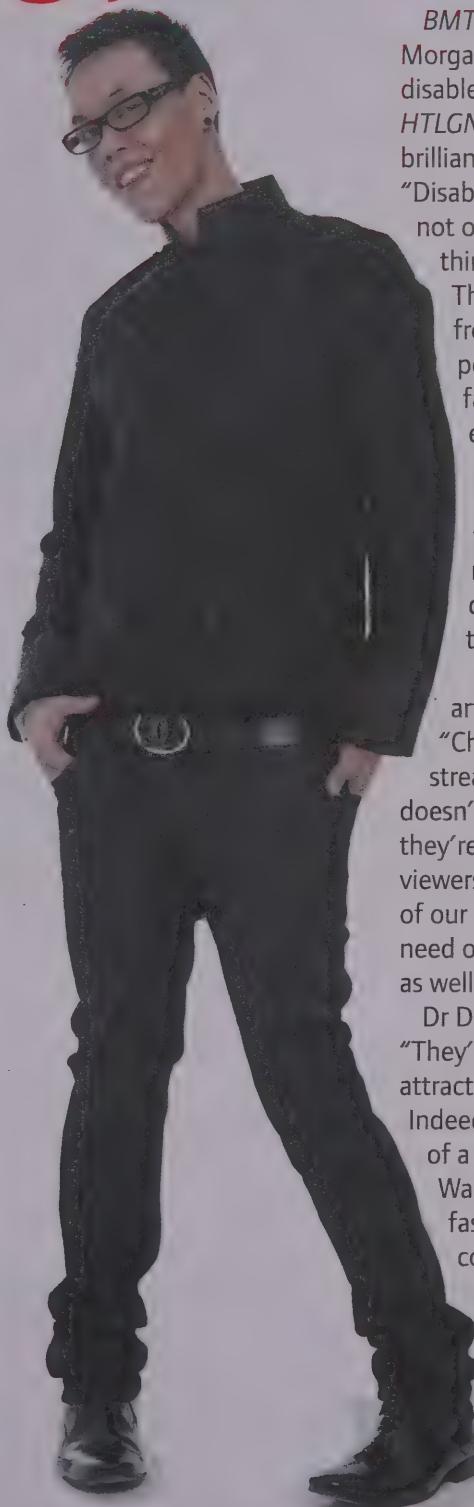
explores the merits of Channel 4's wish to screen disabled people who'll bare all

Some people will do anything to get on television. They'll reveal their darkest secrets, take part in Jerry Springer-esque slanging matches and in *How to Look Good Naked (HTLGN)* they'll strip off.

As a disabled person with various disability-related body hang-ups, I couldn't think of anything worse, but word has it that the hunt is on for disabled contributors for the next series.

Alison Walsh, editorial manager, Disability Channel 4 says, "It's simply inclusion at work. The aim of the series is for the person to feel comfortable in their own skin and disabled people might have as much of a problem with that as anyone."

It's possible that the inclusion of a nude photo shoot in *Britain's Missing Top Model* inspired the *HTLGN* production team since, as Walsh admits, they were "quite envious of the publicity *Britain's Missing Top Model (BMTM)* had".



BMTM runner-up Sophie Morgan can't wait to see disabled contributors on *HTLGN*. "I think it's a brilliant idea!" she says. "Disability and nudity are not often juxtaposed and I think they should be.

The feeling of freedom from inhibition when I posed nude was fantastic. I felt the experience was very rewarding, as I think it encouraged women – disabled or not – to feel more comfortable with themselves."

But Dr Paul Darke, artist and writer, says: "Channel 4 call it mainstreaming but that doesn't work on its own if they're trying to give viewers an accurate picture of our lives. To do that we need our own programmes as well."

Dr Darke predicts: "They'll go for more attractive disabled people." Indeed that would be less of a challenge for Gok Wan (pictured), the fashion stylist who has come to fame through *HTLGN*, than picking someone with a real physical disfigurement because the show

tends to highlight the fact that most people's hang-ups are in their head rather than their bodies. A more interesting programme would be to see how they'd get someone to love a tangible disfigurement, even at risk of the inevitable gawping.

An even greater feat would be to incorporate that element of the show where the people they accost on the street say positive things about that person.

The bottom line (so to speak) is that not all disabled people are hung up about the way they look. If Wan can get that message across, help a few disabled individuals gain some confidence, give the rest of us a few tips and the general public some inspiring insight then that would be great. But it's a tall order.

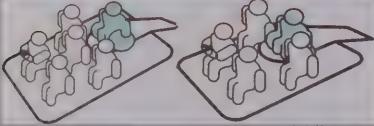
Meanwhile I'll be keeping my clothes firmly on and leaving the naked test to some other poor sod!

→ Have your say

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disability rights

Campbell says ratify before election



Baroness Campbell of Surbiton tells **Sunil Peck** that delaying ratification of the UN convention on disability rights may mean that it never happens

A prominent disabled member of the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has increased the pressure on government to ratify a United Nations convention protecting the human rights of disabled people.

Crossbench peer Baroness [Jane] Campbell (pictured, above), member and former chair of the Disability

Committee at the EHRC, has written to the Home Secretary and the secretaries of state for Defence, Work and Pensions, and Children, Families and Schools asking them to make public the opt-outs they are seeking and explain their reasoning for doing so.

By ratifying the convention the UK would accept legal obligations under the convention and enact any

necessary legislation.

Campbell told *Disability Now* that she was prompted to write to the government because of her disappointment that ratification had been pushed back from the end of last year to this spring.

"With Anne McGuire [former Minister for Disabled People] we pretty much had a guarantee that the government would ratify by Christmas [2008] and I don't think that anything has particularly changed [in the meantime]," she said. "So why are we being so careful and saying that we are going to sort these reservations out before we sign?"

The EHRC's Disability Committee would prefer the government to ratify the convention with no reservations but Campbell felt that that was not pragmatic.

She said it was more practical to ratify the convention before ironing out any reservations later. "We might never ratify and go on for ever trying to sort out the reservations. I'm not sure we will iron out all the reservations in the next year or so. So do we put everything on hold for possibly another five years or more? It's a really tricky one."

The UK does already have legislation in place, in the shape of the Disability

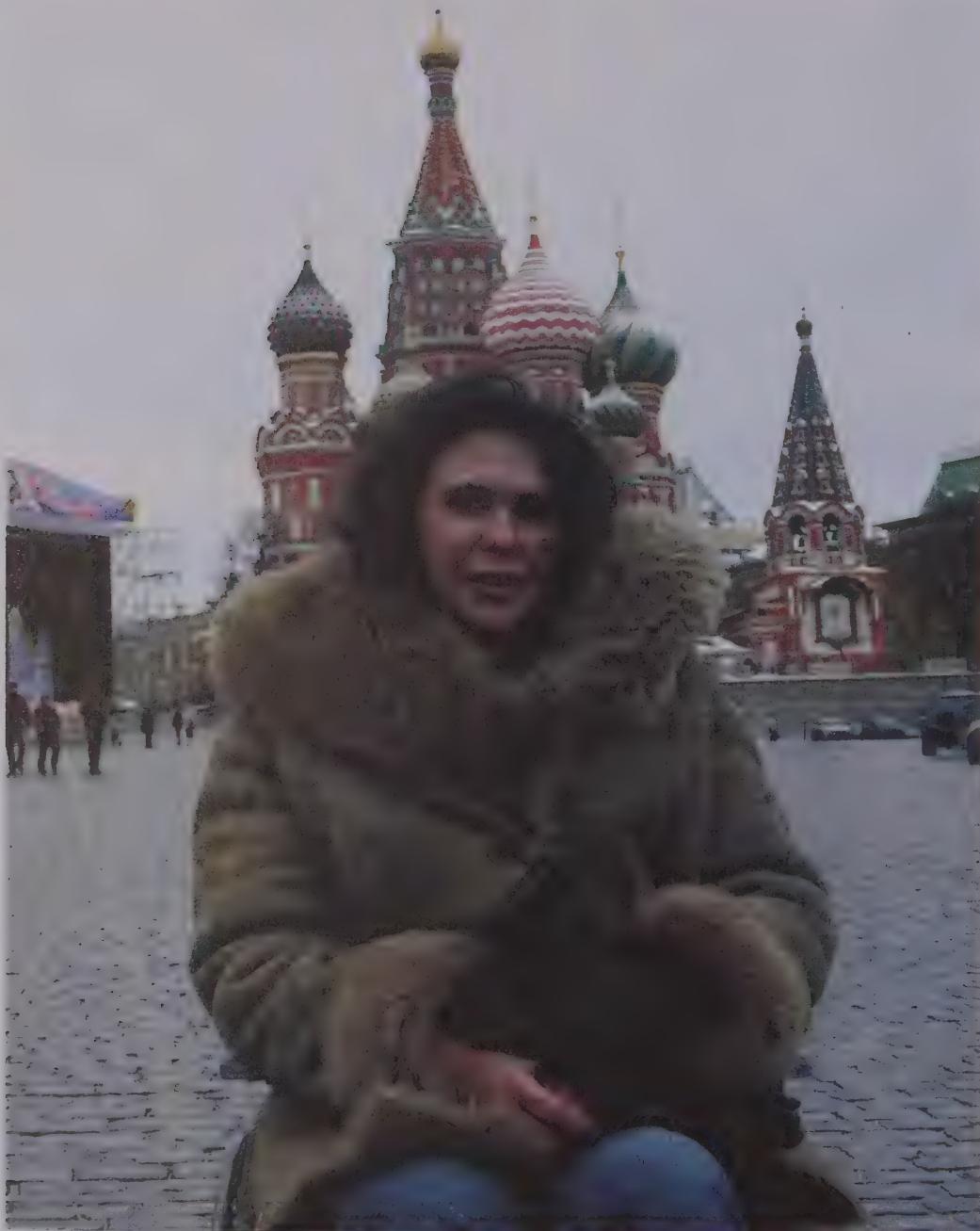
Discrimination Act (DDA) for promoting disability rights, but Campbell says that the failure to ratify thus far is significant because it sends out a message that human rights are not important in the UK.

"The promotion and development of human rights is a vital part of getting disabled people what they need to be equal citizens. It's an important part of our equality and human rights framework."

She stops short of agreeing with a parliamentary report from MPs and peers, in a Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, that said that the government had alienated disabled people by delaying ratification of the convention. But she does want Jonathan Shaw, the minister for disabled people, to know that "the disability movement cannot be mucked about."

Concerned that the Conservative Party has questioned the need for a human rights act, she says that it is essential for the EHRC to work with disabled people and the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights to make sure that ratification takes place before the next general election and a possible Conservative government.

worldview



Living under Moscow rules

Russia's more than 14 million people with disabilities experience inadequate and inferior education, community isolation, and low self-esteem says

Natalya Prisetskaya with Denise Roza

Russians with disabilities are still marginalised and deprived of the same rights and opportunities that non-disabled citizens enjoy. Russian statistics demonstrate that the majority of disabled children, ages seven to 18, are isolated in their homes, segregated in specialised institutions, and more than 50 per cent receive no education at all. Getting access to employment is also a challenge that nearly 90 per cent of disabled people who are unemployed face.

I am 35 years old, a native Moscovite and was raised in a very loving and caring family: two parents and a little sister. When I was 15, I had an accident that caused a spinal cord injury. Since then, I have been using a wheelchair. In Russia, the dominant approach to disability is the medical approach. It wasn't until I met other wheelchair users at rehabilitation centres that I began to realise life would not come to an end if I used a wheelchair for the rest of my life. As a recently disabled person 20 years ago, there were no centres like the one I saw in the US many years later, where disabled people provided peer support and advice for each other.

I tried to attend Moscow

State University, but gave up after two years of frustration dealing with the stairs, inaccessible transportation, and dependence on family members without whom I couldn't have made it to my classes. A few years later I got a junior college degree in computer graphics from a rehabilitation centre in Moscow. But my goal was to eventually get a university degree in Management, and years later, after I had my own car and job, I succeeded in doing this. My new abilities as an activist also helped me to speak out for my rights while at the university, and to demand accessibility. Today, because of this, my university is one of the most accessible in Moscow for wheelchair users.

I have been working at the Russian disability NGO, Perspektiva, for nearly ten years, starting as an assistant to the office manager. Now I am in one of the top managerial positions and currently in charge of Perspektiva's peace building project in the Northern Caucasus and our access to sports and recreation project.

The main barrier I face today is inaccessibility. My parents, for example, live in an apartment building where you have to climb 18 steps before getting to the lift. Although accessibility

legislation was passed in Moscow five years ago, there is still very limited accessibility. I live in an accessible apartment building where there is a ramp at the entrance and a chairlift from the ground floor to the lift that is just five steps up. I have managed to get a reserved parking space near my apartment which is very rare in Moscow. There are about 25 accessible buses in

It wasn't until I met other wheelchairs users at rehabilitation centres that I began to realise life would not come to an end if I used a wheelchair for the rest of my life

Moscow and a few streets that now have dropped curbs (they were installed in 2008). There is a para-transit system, but it is expensive (\$8 per hour) in a big city like Moscow. For someone living on their pension of \$100 to \$250 per month, it is not affordable to pay for this form of transportation daily.

And although I have managed to get a free reserved parking space and an accessible apartment, the majority of disabled people

in Moscow and across Russia are still living in very inaccessible conditions. Many even have difficulties managing in their own homes because of the small apartments, narrow halls and narrow bathroom doors. People are obliged to make renovations to their homes which they as a rule pay for themselves.

My colleagues with other types of disabilities also deal with access issues. Pavel, who coordinates our inclusive education programmes in Moscow, is blind and has to make his way to work everyday on the metro and deal with the inaccessible and dangerous streets. He uses a cane to get around the city, but he has still been hit by cars on several occasions. The "white cane" rule does not apply in Russia, and no one even notices the white cane until it's too late. Another colleague – our head lawyer, Maksim Laryonov, has a hearing impairment and uses both speech and sign language to communicate. Maksim, too, faces discrimination at most meetings, or other large gatherings that he attends, because a sign language translator is not automatically provided.

In July, I experienced discrimination when traveling by aeroplane to another city to hold a seminar. Just as I was about

to board the plane, I was told that I would not be allowed on because I was a wheelchair user flying without an attendant. At first I thought it was a joke. After all, I had flown on this airline and this route many times and this had never happened. I called our office, spoke to our lawyer and then to our public relations manager. That day was just the beginning of a campaign that would last about four months and provide many, many opportunities to speak out for the rights of disabled people. The story was on all major Russian TV and radio stations. Then, our lawyer, Maksim, helped me file a lawsuit. Just weeks later, the Russian government signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This was the first case of its kind in Russia, and it attracted the attention of people across Russia who had never even thought about all of the discrimination that disabled people face daily.

My work as an activist educating other people with disabilities about their rights has helped me become a better advocate for myself. The majority of disabled people in Russia still need peer support, and need to be educated about their rights and how to be effective activists.

onetowatch

Commanding voice

Garry Robson, whose grandparents were travelling players in the Midlands and the North between the wars, began his artistic life as an itinerant musician. He quickly became a respected actor and director and set up his own company, Fittings Multimedia Arts. As a wheelchair-user tired of being overlooked, he cultivated a booming voice that landed him the role of the Commander in CBBC's *Crisis Control*.

What's the best thing about being disabled?

Being "special"! No, not really, but like any oppressed group we get to have a different worldview. There's value in being an outsider.

What makes you angry?

The pat-you-on-the-head mentality towards us. And Gaza: when small children are being murdered in their homes I feel frustrated and impotent.

What's the funniest thing anyone's ever said to you about your impairment, and have you any good putdowns?

I love the *Family Guy* episode where Peter Griffen sees his wheelchair-using neighbour for the first time and says "Holy Crip. It's a Crapple!" And I once yelled at an ostensibly able-bodied suit leaving a disabled bog: "What's your problem? Dyslexia?" Now I'm racked with guilt that he had a hidden disability and I've belittled the plight of dyslexics!

If you were Prime Minister what one thing would you do to improve things for disabled people?

Outlaw normality.

What's the one thing that could be invented to make your life as a disabled person better?

Time travel – just for fun.

What do you most like about your work?

I get to play all the time; it keeps my mind open.

And what do you not like about it?

Early starts for filming on bitterly cold mornings.



Who's your favourite disabled person ever?

Ian Dury. I love his music and I loved his attitude: feisty and no nonsense. Apart from the misogyny.

Do you have any special or hidden talent apart from acting?

I can read minds. Oh yes I can.

If you didn't have your impairment, which other one would you like to have for a day?

A missing pinkie.

How would you sum yourself up in ten words or fewer?

Beautiful. Sexy. Talented. Humble. Well worth investing in.

→ Who do you think is One to Watch?

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Channel 4's teen soap *Hollyoaks* welcomes the latest addition to its roster of characters. Kelly-Marie Stewart is blonde, bubbly and beautiful. And, as she tells **Cathy Reay**, she's about to make the most of her break to sell disability into the mainstream

One bubbly soap star

Kelly-Marie Stewart has got plenty to say, she's got the world at her feet, only she can't move her legs.

"I don't think it's wrong to be curious about why I'm in a wheelchair," says the 24-year-old Liverpudlian actress. Speaking in between shooting scenes for her new role, Kelly-Marie, who has Guillain-Barré syndrome, says she is excited to be one of the only actresses with a visible impairment currently playing a prominent role on a popular soap.

"There are so many conditions that people aren't aware of and have never heard of. This is a good way of raising awareness of disability generally. People still seem to see a wheelchair as a problem [when trying to work in acting] but, in this day and age, it's not."

At least, that's her story: "I've been in a chair for two-and-a-half years and have never been turned down for something because of it," she explains while getting into her character.

Kelly-Marie's rare condition, which affects around 1,500 people a year in the UK, is marked by degenerative

paralysis of the legs, arms and, in some cases, chest. "I am stabilised from the waist down, which is very fortunate," she says.

"Initially I couldn't bear any weight on my legs but over time I've become a lot stronger. I've gone through two-and-a-half years of intensive therapy so that my legs can hold me up, but I have no movement."

People still seem to see a wheelchair as a problem [when trying to work in acting] but, in this day and age, it's not

When Kelly-Marie came out of hospital two-and-a-half years ago, she was forced to face the prospect of spending the rest of her life in a wheelchair. Going through that change, she says, has meant that she and the people she surrounds herself with had to learn a lot very quickly.

After attending theatrical academies Elliott Clarke and Liverpool Theatre School in her teenage years, Kelly-Marie

enjoyed modelling for several accessible designers including WheelieChix-Chic at London Fashion Week. She's also appeared in television adverts alongside footballer Darren Campbell for Sky and another for the charity Liveability.

When she read about the auditions for established character Zak Ramsey's little sister Hayley, Kelly-Marie jumped at the opportunity.

"The castings and callbacks went on for quite a long time. Normally characters aren't cast so far in advance but it just so happened that Hayley was, so by the time they had chosen me most of her storylines hadn't yet been written," she explains.

It handily meant that the soap's writers could easily write Kelly-Marie's condition into her role. "They weren't looking for someone with an impairment when the role was cast so I think it's important to address the reason behind Hayley being in a wheelchair," says Kelly-Marie.

"If someone comes into a TV programme in a wheelchair, it's natural for people to want to know why. It's

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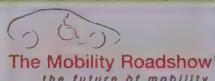
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LIME PICTURES

Michaela McQueen (far right, played by Hollie-Jay Bowes), Zak Ramsey's (played by Kent Riley) love interest on the *Hollyoaks* set with Kelly-Marie

exactly the same as if someone walked onto the *EastEnders* set with a black eye; people want to ask how they got it."

As Kelly-Marie is introduced into the fold, her onscreen brother Zak has difficulties coming to terms with his sister's condition. But, Kelly-Marie is confident that it will soon be forgotten.

"Hayley is going to fall into things quite normally; she'll become part of the furniture. She actually ends up with a love interest. It just had to be addressed initially in the same way as any other new character's background would be."

When she arrived on the *Hollyoaks* set, in what was to be her first experience of continual television acting, Kelly-Marie says she was

nervous of how her colleagues would deal with her condition.

"It was a worry for me, how everyone would adapt, but the cast and crew have been brilliant. Obviously it's a new learning curve to

If it's within reason to make adaptations, anyone should be allowed to do whatever they want to

have a wheelchair permanently on set, but everyone has adapted really well."

Although at the time of writing she's only been filming for a few weeks, Kelly-Marie has already palled up behind the scenes with her co-stars. "Everyone is so welcoming; being on

set is a great laugh. I'm making friends all the time, particularly with Kent who plays my brother Zak."

As she settles into the soap, Kelly-Marie's happy-go-lucky character is set to develop several relationships with other cast members. "My contract was initially signed for the standard six months, but my storylines at the moment go beyond that," says Kelly-Marie happily.

But she's certainly not getting a big head about it all; she dismisses our suggestion of dreaming about starring in a film alongside Johnny Depp with a loud laugh, explaining: "For now I just want to concentrate on what I'm doing. Obviously it's in my interest to make sure this goes okay and that it's a success." ➔

Kelly-Marie also hopes that, through her new line of work, she is able to break the mould and show other people with impairments that they can follow their dreams. "If it's within reason to make adaptations, anyone should be allowed to do whatever they want to."

"Sure, I've been on aeroplanes and I realise that maybe someone like me couldn't be a stewardess, but if you want to act or do something like work in the police, there's no reason why you shouldn't be able to."

Because her particular condition has deteriorated, Kelly-Marie wasn't always in a wheelchair, and going through that change, she says, has meant that she and the people she surrounds herself with had to learn a lot very quickly.



if people see me on screen hopefully the character can raise awareness and make people think about things like that."

Her innocent, bubbly personality, sweet childlike voice and stunning looks are all attributes of a star in the making. The fact that she's in a wheelchair clearly doesn't affect Kelly-Marie's perception of her capabilities ("I've always been a determined girl") and she's excited to see what the public will make of her new role.

"If this could influence people in any way, well that's a really good thing. At the end of the day, it can only be positive, can't it?"

Well, we certainly think so.

Kelly-Marie's character Hayley Ramsey first appeared in *Hollyoaks* at the end of last month. ■

Kelly-Marie models at the 2008 WheelieChix-Chic show

"Before I was in a chair, I never really spent anytime with anyone that was disabled in the same way. My family and friends, from spending time around me, have learnt a lot, so

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Dropping off the social radar

The numbers of disabled people seeking asylum in the UK is not known. But, as **Sunil Peck** reports, what is clear is that those who are here all too often fall between the two stools of social care and asylum support provision



Youssef Bey-Zekkoub (pictured, above) is one of a hidden population of disabled asylum-seekers. He has come to the UK to seek refuge from persecution in his own country.

Bey-Zekkoub fled Algeria where he was beaten up and tortured during the civil war. He opted to seek asylum in the UK because he thought he would

receive fair treatment from the authorities here.

But Bey-Zekkoub has had to fight indifference and even discrimination to access the support and services which he is entitled to while his application for refugee status is being considered.

"I suffered a lot and I even ended up in a psychiatric hospital because it got too much. I don't regret coming here

“Asylum organisations see you are in a wheelchair and they get stuck, they can not handle it. I keep emailing and ringing them but they have no idea where to start”

though, and I am hoping that something good will come out of this."

As one example, Bey-Zekkoub is a wheelchair user but he only received a suitable chair three years after entering the UK, thanks to the assistance of the Spinal Injuries Association.

His experiences are typical of many disabled asylum-seekers. When he arrived in the UK in 2003, he sought information from disability and asylum support organisations.

“Asylum organisations see you are in a wheelchair and they get stuck, they can not handle it. I keep emailing and ringing them but they have no idea where to start.”

His local disability organisation was unhelpful and told him that as he was an asylum-seeker he should go back to an asylum support organisation for assistance.

Bey-Zekkoub now lives in a private flat and survives on around £40 a



JAMIE TROUNCE

Iman Saab (left) and Claire Glasman (right). WinVisible supports disabled asylum seekers whom the system has failed

week from social services.

He says that the flat is a "nightmare". "I need to transfer myself into the bath and it is not really safe. The toilet is really tiny so once I go inside with my wheelchair there is no room left to transfer yourself. The kitchen as well, there is nothing I can use. Everything is too high, the cooker, the cupboards and the sink."

He has complained to the council but the landlord will not allow them to adapt the property. Bey-Zekkoub's status means that he is not entitled to live in social housing.

But he can not understand why, if his local authority is prepared to pay his rent, it will not allow him to find a more accessible property to live in.

When I speak to Bey-Zekkoub, he tells me that his fridge is empty and that fresh food has become a luxury. He is indebted to his college which has given him money to buy food from its hardship fund.

As Jonathan Ellis, director of policy and development at the Refugee Council, puts it: "Provisions for disabled asylum seekers are minimal. Asylum seekers are supported outside the mainstream benefits system, and are not entitled to disability living allowance. In some cases, where there is a need for specialist care, they will be allowed to apply for Section 21 support which is provided by the local authority under the National Assistance Act. However the threshold for this gets higher every year."

Bey-Zekkoub's immigration status means that although he does not qualify to receive direct payments to meet his care needs, his local authority does pay for him to have home care. He says that he has had a string of different personal assistants (PAs) which he feels causes a loss of dignity: "I don't like having to show my bottom to so many women."

Bey-Zekkoub can not understand why his local authority is happy to pay

for him to receive support at home but will not give him the freedom to employ his own PA.

The number of asylum-seekers in the UK in 2007 was more than 570,000 according to the government, but there is no official figure for disabled asylum-seekers in the UK. What's more, academic research into their needs is scarce.

In 2002, research published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that disabled asylum-seekers were being denied support because of confusion among social services and other service providers about what they were entitled to.

While a second study in 2008 concluded that disabled asylum-seekers in London still encounter significant barriers to accessing statutory services for health, housing and benefits.

Claire Glasman, from WinVisible, an organisation which campaigns for rights for disabled asylum-seekers, says ➤

that the situation is getting worse and talks of a "climate of refusal" among service providers. Indeed, WinVisible campaigned on behalf of a group of disabled asylum-seekers who were being denied passes for free travel in London. Lambeth Council reversed its position after a legal challenge.

"Because successive governments have had a witch-hunt into so called bogus asylum-seekers, there is discrimination which affects every area."

She adds that cuts to the legal aid system are also making it harder for disabled asylum-seekers to challenge discrimination:

Another disabled asylum-seeker, Iman Saab, is on the run from her family in Lebanon. They threatened to kill her after she converted to Christianity.

Unlike Bey-Zekkoub, she is happy with the house she lives in but it took months for her to secure the appropriate adaptations.

She does not have the right to take up employment but is desperate to gain refugee status so she can start looking for a job. She applied for refugee status ten years ago and yearns to work as a fashion designer.

Because successive governments have had a witch-hunt into so called bogus asylum-seekers, there is discrimination which affects every area

"I would like my papers so I can do what I want to do, I would like to be free. I would like to drive but I can't because I don't have disability allowances. I would like to work and



Disabled asylum-seeker, Angela Nhongo, is frustrated by her experience in Manchester

do something to feel like I am human."

She goes to college, but the main reason for doing so is not academic.

"I study because I like to go out and see people. If I stayed at home, I would die."

She has been told by her local authority that although she finds it hard to propel a manual wheelchair, she is not entitled to an electric wheelchair because she does not claim disability benefits. She can not afford to buy one herself.

She says that she only got more than 45 minutes a week home care after ending up in hospital following a fall at home. She had been trying for seven months. It was arranged by the hospital social worker not the community worker.

Douglas Joy of the Disability Law Service says that this is a familiar story. He says that scant resources often mean that social services will be obstructive and do their utmost

to avoid providing support to disabled asylum-seekers.

"In my experience, if a disabled asylum-seeker turns up at social services, they will be told that social services can not help them and that the National Asylum Support Service are the people that should be helping them, and they sort of fall down the middle."

But although Saab and Bey-Zekkoub face a great deal of hardship, are they deserving of any more sympathy than the thousands of disabled UK citizens who also endure poverty and discrimination?

Claire Glasman thinks that they are. She warns that the demonisation of disabled asylum-seekers could set a dangerous precedent for disabled UK citizens.

"The way that people seeking asylum have been treated has been to attack the basic safety net which we all benefit from. Standards of respectful

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treatment and entitlement are basic for a caring society. It is a precedent for what could happen with us, because we are fighting welfare reforms where you have to prove that you are doing work-focused activity as a condition of claiming benefit, and if you don't behave in a way which is prescribed to you then you are facing benefit sanctions. It is an attack on the expectation that vulnerable people should be looked after and not left to beg on the street."

Angela Nhongo, a disabled asylum-seeker now living in Manchester, became so frustrated by her experiences of trying to secure support, that she decided to set up a one-stop shop to provide information for others like her.

Nhongo spent hours in her local

“I would like my papers so I can do what I want to do, I would like to be free...I would like to work and do something to feel like I am human”

library ploughing through books and leaflets researching the support she was entitled to. But she says that not everyone has the confidence to do what she did, and do things like find organisations who can supply access equipment like screenreading software and wheelchairs.

But while Nhongo is in a position to make the lives of disabled asylum-seekers easier, she is in no position to change the fact that

disabled asylum-seekers are often left feeling like second-class citizens by service providers and disability organisations.

Glasman says that mainstream disability organisations must do more to reach out and engage with disabled asylum-seekers. But she says that disabled asylum-seekers need to be recognised as a group of people in need of support in the same way that disabled UK residents are.

"A lot of people are now objecting to the separate asylum support system, and are asking why people can't be in the mainstream, and why people don't have the right to work as well."

She adds: "We would like people to be able to be re-integrated into the overall welfare system and not be treated separately." ■

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In 2008 the group are developing 2 new purpose built facilities: Beechcroft Care Centre, West Hoathly Road, East Grinstead and Horncastle Care Centre, Plawhatch Lane, Sharphorne, East Grinstead

Beechcroft Care Centre, which opened in May 2008, is in East Grinstead and caters for twenty young people with physical disabilities and learning difficulties. Person-centered planning is at the forefront of our philosophy with the service users' needs and wishes at the centre of our service.

This care home provides specialist nursing care and is equipped with the latest technology aids to provide a safe, comfortable, homely environment for our service users. Beechcroft Care Centre is a specialist care home with twenty places for people with learning and/or physical disabilities. It offers superb purpose-built facilities with track hoisting throughout. Each single room is provided with en suite facilities. A swimming pool and spa pool are available to all service users along with sensory and physiotherapy rooms.



Horncastle Care Centre, Plawhatch Lane, Sharphorne, East Grinstead

This service opened in October 2008. It provides a purpose built residential service with 24 hour nursing support for people with acquired brain injury and neurological conditions.

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For further information
Please contact Corrine Wallace, Head of Operational Care Services. Tel: 01403 217338 • Fax: 01403 219842
email: corrine.wallace@sussexhealthcare.org



yourviews

Please look after this bear

Following your Mediawatch article (*Disability Now* January 2009, *Don't just grin and bear it*) I am at a loss as to the logic of the campaign against Pudsey Bear.

Richard

Downes seems to imply that there should be no charities such as Scope and Children in Need and that all the support should come from the taxpayer. Both these charities do a lot of good work for children and many smaller



organisations need the Children in Need money to continue helping disabled youngsters.

As a taxpayer, I would be most unhappy if some of my taxes went to charities that I do not support or agree with.

I also found the campaign to shoot Pudsey deeply offensive, as well as very negative. I don't think that anything

that encourages violence, however misguidedly thought to be harmless "fun", should be encouraged by a responsible magazine, published by a charity such as yours.

J.K. Hayward, by email

Getting tougher on blue bay abuse: release the rottweiler

There seems to be a general disregard for whether disabled people can park or not, with supermarkets in particular preferring to hear the ring of the tills rather than the sounds of disgruntled shoppers.

I therefore offer some suggestions for dealing with this problem and offenders:

1. Give local authorities the

power to go onto private land where the public also has access.

2. Wheel clamp those found not to be disabled.
3. Issue a £500 fine and 12 penalty points.
4. Charge a £50-per-day excess on top of the £500 fine for a maximum of seven days and then scrap the vehicle.
5. Issue a 12-month driving ban on first-time offenders who abuse disabled parking spaces, a two-year ban for

second-time offenders, three years for third-timers, and so on.

6. In addition, make parking in disabled parking spaces without being the card-holder or authority carry a £1,000 fine on the first offence; also, confiscate the blue badges and ban their use for 12 months. For the second offence make it a £5,000 fine and a lifetime confiscation and ban.

As Baywatch (*Disability Now* campaigns) appears not to be working, such draconian measures are the only wake-up call some people will understand.

Hopefully, such actions would financially hurt those who are wrongfully parking.

Baywatch, though it should work, is a waste of time. It is a toothless bulldog. If you want results, you need an agile rottweiler.

It is now time to take off the velvet gloves and abandon the softly softly approach in favour of a much tougher regime. No voluntary process is going to work.

Bee Chichester, Horncastle, Lincs.

Disabled parkers face discrimination

I was recently issued with a parking ticket on the grounds that I had parked in a disabled bay without displaying my clock, even

though I had not exceeded the time limit for the bay.

This means that disabled people can be penalised as though they had exceeded a time limit without having done so (in this case after less than ten minutes).

If a fit person parks where there is a time limit, the officer will note the time he sees it and return later. A ticket will only be issued if the time limit is exceeded.

Surely a disabled person is entitled to have any offence treated in a similar way before being penalised?

A. Hyde, Braintree, Essex

Political will needed to rebuild shattered Iraqi lives

A disabled person's lot is not an easy one but having read Salam Talib's account of his life in Baghdad before and after occupation (*Disability Now* January 2009, *Baghdad Nightmares*) I realise that by comparison we live in Utopia in Britain.

Iraq had its fair share of disabled people before hostilities and many more have undoubtedly been disabled by the conflict.

Salam says that Iraq's disabled have the capacity to rebuild their shattered lives. Let's hope the country has the political will to allow it.

Spencer Arnott, Holmer Green, Bucks

Flippancy obscures Carter's seriousness

I wish Paul Carter would be more tolerant of hotels etc. (*Disability Now* various issues, *Backlash*). There isn't that much kindness and help around. And no doubt he is sincere but his jokiness makes him appear not so.

Eunice Wilson, London SWG

New label needed for service-users

Over the last year I have become involved with various Herefordshire County Council and National Health Service Primary Care Trust panels, and advisory meetings to do with the involvement of disabled people in social and health care.

Although, as with any large corporation, progress is slow, I find my views are heard, respected and even acted upon.

One point, however, has come to my notice in particular and I wonder if anyone can come up with an answer.

Most of the panel or committee members have a title, be that a job title, an honorary position, or "carer", "nurse", etc, but the rest of us are simply called "service-users" or more commonly just "users" and



COURTESY OF NEXUSPHOTO

'No quick fix' for Metro scooter ban

Some time ago, Nexus, which runs the Tyne and Wear Metro, banned the use of mobility scooters after a number of accidents with scooters, one of which went right through a carriage and out onto the track on the opposite side (*see CCTV footage, above*).

The ban has caused a lot of problems for disabled people, who cannot now travel as freely as before.

I would like *Disability Now* to ask Nexus what it is doing to alleviate the danger and let scooters

back on the system again.
Peter Wilson, by email

Bernard Garner, Director General of Nexus, which owns, manages and is modernising Metro, said: "We're working on ways we could get mobility scooters back on Metro. I appreciate the problems the ban causes but there are no quick fixes, as we have to be absolutely sure Metro is safe for all users.

"Nexus recently received a commitment of around £300 million from the

government to modernise Metro, with a proportion to be spent on stations and trains as part of this. We will be building better accessibility into these projects.

"In the meantime, can I remind *Disability Now* readers that electric wheelchairs are not restricted on Metro. If any disabled Tyne and Wear resident has particular issues getting around, they can phone our social inclusion unit on 0191 203 3460 for advice."

we don't much like it. We feel that "users" has connotations of being "abusers", in common parlance.

What would we like to be called? Something that is non-sexist, non-ageist and in fact non-discriminatory in every way!

Does anyone have any ideas?

Hillary Stringer, by email

EDITOR'S NOTE: Ruth Patrick's piece *Dream on* (*Disability Now* January 2009) has led to inquiries about extra payments being made to some disabled people following a pre-budget statement announcement. Information can be found at: www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On_a_low_income/DG_10018704

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- email us editor@disabilitynow.org.uk



Culture change puts people first

There's a shift in care provision, away from what professionals think people need towards the needs of the individual, says **Andy Rickell**

Putting People First is the government programme that will change the delivery of social "care" from one mainly decided by professional providers to one decided by the people who need support. This is called "personalisation". It is a key plank of the government's Independent Living Strategy and offers disabled and older people choice and control over the funding that pays for their support. People who were involved in the pilots of these so-called "individual budgets" said that it really gave them much better life choices, and I expect the rest of England will agree when it happens for them too.

Some local authorities are keen to lead in making these changes. I suspect though that many are wary, and certainly many of the people they employ are wary, thinking this change may either cost them their jobs, or at least take away important parts of their roles. I am keen to put their minds at rest.

The bottom line is that after these changes,

disabled and older people will continue to need paid workers to provide their support and professionals to ensure effective meeting of their needs. Some workers' employers may change and so might their roles, but these changes will make the work more interesting and rewarding.

The new culture needs to be one where each disabled or older person becomes the decision-making customer

The fundamental change will actually be about "culture" – the way things are done and the reasons why they are done that way. There are two key ideas underpinning the current social "care" culture that personalisation will challenge. Firstly, that disabled and older people who need support are somehow not competent to decide on that support. Secondly, that the best way to manage "care" is for as much of the decisions about assessment,

funding and delivery as possible to remain within the hands of the local authority, or its tightly-monitored suppliers.

Instead the new culture needs to be one where each disabled or older person becomes the decision-making customer, and gets every help to make what choices they can, irrespective of impairment. Such customers will need to know what they might have, and here the professional can act as advisor (possibly now employed by a user-led organisation (ULO)), both about their potential choices and sources of state funding via supported self-assessment.

The local authority must still gate-keep the funding via other professionals, but now they must ensure that the "market" delivers the solutions people want, rather than necessarily delivering it themselves.

Provision is likely to be increasingly community-based than institutionally-based, and self-funders and people who get state funding will "shop" together. But they will still want paid support, though now called personal assistants/support workers and provided by competing providers.

Some changes in employment will be more apparent than real. However, I can understand employees' concerns about changes to terms and conditions that might result as people move from local authority employment to ULOs, and these need to be addressed fairly. This new independent living system will require greater skills from staff than the social "care" system we currently have. I want to see the status of people in this profession improved, not worsened.

• Andy Rickell is a disability rights campaigner

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Q I am a 47-year-old with progressive MS and have a problem getting into bed. Once I am lying down I need a small adjustment of position to get comfortable: towards the centre of the bed or up the bed but never more than a few inches and always involving two carers. I have been in hospital many times and have received care at home for four years. During that time, nobody has ever expressed concern about moving me but the management is now reprimanding all its carers for not using slide sheets. I feel this is unfair. Whenever we have tried to use a slide sheet in the past it has proved unsuccessful. It makes me feel unsafe; it involves undignified rolling back and forth; my carers feel it is harder for them; it takes longer; and I still need adjusting when the

sheet is removed. In short, slide sheets cause more problems than they solve, yet the management insists on their use and seems unconcerned about my objections. Let me emphasise that I would never expect my carers to do anything that might put them at risk or that they might feel uncomfortable with. I would very much appreciate your input on this matter. Do you think, as I do, that the council is failing to use its common sense?

Name supplied, via email



Douglas Joy: Health and safety matters in this context are largely governed by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 but manual lifting and handling in the workplace is governed by the Manual Handling Operations Regulations

1992, which requires employers to assess the manual handling operations that need to be carried out in the workplace and then put in place appropriate steps to reduce the risk of injury. Your local Social Services Department is probably trying, perhaps overzealously, to comply with this legislation in introducing the rule regarding slide sheets, as well as attempting to fulfill its general duty to its employees to provide a safe working environment. Policies on things such as manual lifting in the workplace can constitute a breach of a person's human rights under the Human Rights Act 1998 (as happened in the case of *R v East Sussex County Council ex parte A, B, X and Y* [2003]) but usually only where applying the relevant general rule seriously infringes disabled people's

ability to live their lives. The Court in *R v East Sussex County Council* also stated that local authorities must strike a balance between the human rights of disabled people and the rights of their employees and carers to a safe working environment. It is therefore unlikely that the local authority's policy in this case can be challenged on legal grounds.



Q Are there any devices that can be fitted to a car in cases where the driver suffers with impaired consciousness? I suffer with mild epilepsy and although the seizures are extremely brief, they are still active. I was wondering whether you had something that may be suitable for someone with a momentary loss of consciousness.

Paul Eyres, by email

THE EXPERTS

Answering questions on Relationships is **Simon Parratt**, a counselling psychologist who has studied psychosexual therapy. Simon was the only disabled director of the former Association to Aid the Sexual and Personal

Relationships of People with a Disability (SPOD). We have two Legal experts on our panel. **Eleanor Williams** is an employment lawyer specialising in discrimination at Darwin Gray solicitors. Disabled herself, Eleanor lectures

widely and holds a number of advisory positions. **Douglas Joy** is the senior solicitor at the Disability Law Service and is blind. He started working in community care and mental health law in 2002. Other **Benefits and Debt**

questions are answered by **Gary Martin**, who is welfare benefits supervisor at Walthamstow Citizens Advice Bureau. Our **Equipment** guru is **John Mandrak**, who is blind and has worked for nearly 25 years as a disability



DRIVER FATIGUE INDICATOR COURTESY OF MERCEDES-BENZ ("ATTENTION ASSIST SYSTEM")

Ed Passant:

There are detailed medical rules relating to epilepsy and driving, the core of which stipulate that you must have been free from a seizure (with or without medication) for at least a year before you can apply, or re-apply, for a driving licence. If your seizures are still active while you are awake, this would

appear to indicate that you would not be eligible to drive under current rules. In terms of technological advances, there have been developments as a result of research into tiredness at the wheel. One system now marketed to fleet operators uses a range of sensors to detect when a driver's eyes have closed for a period longer than a blink. This event, described as a "micro

sleep", sets off an audible alarm designed to wake the driver up immediately, but this is a long way from innovations designed to take over if you were incapacitated and I am not aware of any currently available devices that would really suit your needs at the moment.

Q I am a wheelchair-user and would like to travel to Florida next year. Is there any airline that can take me on board in my own wheelchair? I am unable to be in any other position apart from the one my wheelchair is moulded to.

Emily Willis

**Andy Wright:**

Unfortunately no airline will allow wheelchair

users to remain in their chair while on board. This is more to do with passenger security and health and safety regulations rather than disability compliance. As far as the moulded seat is concerned, a number of airlines will provide certain types of moulded seat that can be used on board, although moulded seats are a very personalised and tailored item and this solution does not suit all. Some moulded seats can actually be removed from the wheelchair and some airlines will consider allowing these to be placed on the airline seat, which is another possibility.

Naturally, it still very much depends on the type of moulded seat required and whether passengers can benefit from a moulded seat other than their own.

→ **If you have a question for our panel**

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journalist and consultant. He is an advisor on the Disabled Living Foundation's helpline. Answering questions on **Travel** is **Andy Wright**, who is disabled and is managing director of Accessible Travel, a

specialist tour operator providing holidays for people with mobility impairments. Our **Finance** expert is **David Clarke**, who is blind, has spent 14 years in banking and has worked for three leading financial service providers.

He is now a senior partner with Clydesdale Bank. **Kate Sheehan** answers your questions on **Property**. She is an independent occupational therapist with 20 years' experience and a passionate interest in housing. **Motoring**

questions are dealt with by **Ed Passant**, chief executive of the Forum of Mobility Centres, the umbrella body for 17 independent organisations which provide driver and passenger assessment for disabled people.

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Choices & rights

In his new regular column, **Peter White** demands the right to choice in matters of life and death

I came within a whisker of being aborted on the grounds of disability. My mum already had one blind child when she became pregnant with me. I was saved by the state of medical ignorance. Doctors reassured her that the chances of her having another blind child were a million to one. Whoops! I turned out to be a long-odds baby.

When my mum fell pregnant again only a year or so later, she was not so trusting of medical opinion. She got reluctant agreement to a termination – a rare achievement in the 1940s. I've never blamed her. Looking after three blind pre-school children in a post-war prefab, with no guarantees of support or about the kind of future we faced, was no joke for a working-class couple. But what it has left me with, now living a very good life, is a healthy respect for the right to life (mine in particular). What it's also left me with is an even greater respect for my right to choice, unrestricted by other people's view of my disability. Surely at the heart of

everything disabled people have been fighting for for over 40 years is choice: the right to choose where we live, where we work, and our right to join in with all aspects of society. In which case, isn't the ultimate control over your life the right to choose when, and how, to end it?

Which is why I'm concerned about opposition to assisted dying legislation

being based on the vulnerability of disabled people. Should we not make a clear distinction between the right to choose what to do with our own lives, and the right to be protected from undue pressure, whether we're disabled or not, from doctors and relatives, etc?

Whether you oppose this right on religious grounds, or on the grounds that you belong to a particularly vulnerable group, surely what you're doing is stopping everyone else from exercising a right that you don't want.

I absolutely understand why someone with what the world regards as a severe

disability could fear the decision about when they die being taken out of their hands. It should be made virtually impossible for anyone, especially doctors, to be able to do this. But is that a reason for disabled people, who of all people have championed the issue of choice, to use their political muscle to prevent other people from exercising theirs?

We should fight tooth and nail to stop people making life-and-death decisions about us, based on their wholly inadequate understanding of our quality of life, but not at the expense of everyone else's freedom of choice.

cartoon

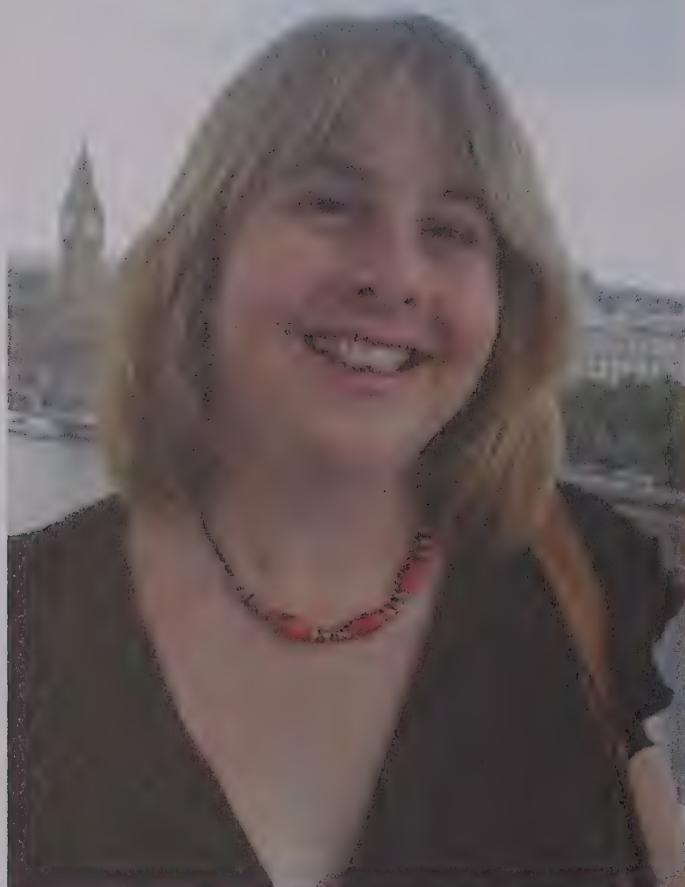
We're fundraising for those able-bodied people whose quality of life has been so diminished by the departure of Ed Stourton from the *Today* programme that they contemplate suicide.



By EdsArt

guestcolumn

Showing a public face



Ten years ago **Natalie Salmon** (pictured, above) gave up a teaching career. Now Head of Equality and Diversity for a national nursing organisation, she believes passionately that disabled people should take high-profile public roles

You'd think that having spent the last ten years championing meaningful involvement of disabled people in public life, I'd be the first in line to get "involved" myself. Wrong.

Despite the fact that I have had an impact in my work, I turned down an opportunity to apply for a position on a public sector steering board of disabled people.

My official excuse was

that I was too busy at work. This was largely true but, in fact, the ghosts of the barriers I have encountered and the disappointments I have felt held me back.

At times I am still that 12-year-old, partially-sighted girl, wearing thicker than bullet-proof lenses in my glasses, who not only volunteered but was chosen along with about six others to take part in a school parliament event. The visiting MP – now a peer – took one glance at me, looked terrified, muttered "handicapped" and then ignored me. He gave everyone a role but me.

This ranks alongside the time a music teacher agreed with a boy in my class that: No, he wouldn't want to sit next to the class spaz either and allowed him to move tables.

But I am not 12 any more and I have proved that I can be incredibly successful. I am now Head of Equality and Diversity at the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC), and conscious of the need to ensure that the

disabled people who choose to contribute their skills and experiences to the work of the NMC find it both professionally and personally rewarding.

I think that as more disabled people hold strategic and managerial roles within the NMC and the public sector in general, we'll at last start to see a difference in how people with disabilities are viewed and treated by society.

It is important that disabled people aren't just involved but are setting the strategic agenda and driving the public sector from within. At that point involvement truly becomes meaningful and active.

I hope that the message we are promoting at the NMC – that we actively want disabled people to apply for our strategic roles to help safeguard the health and well-being of the public – will be the first step in achieving an organisation that truly involves disabled people in all that it does.

• To find out more about the NMC or to get involved in many of the roles available, visit www.nmcpeople.org

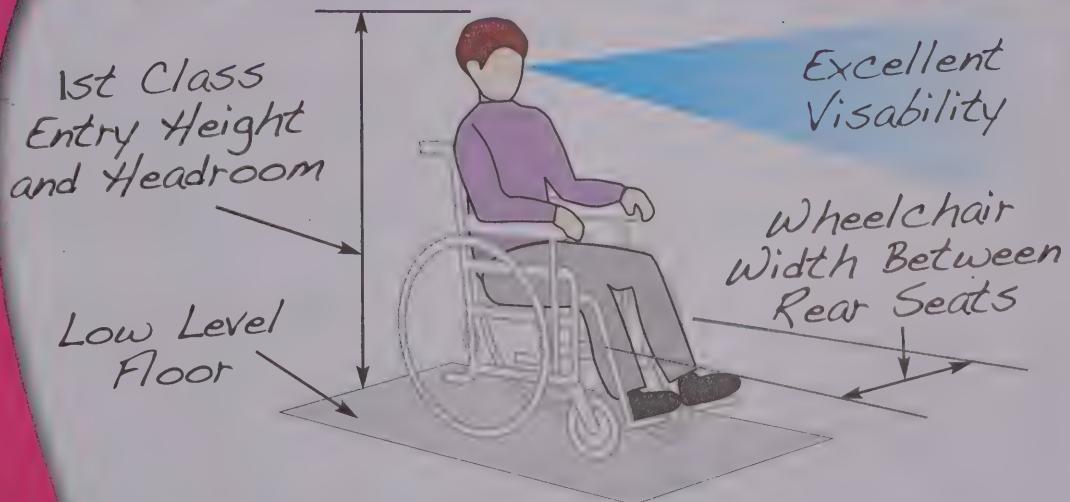
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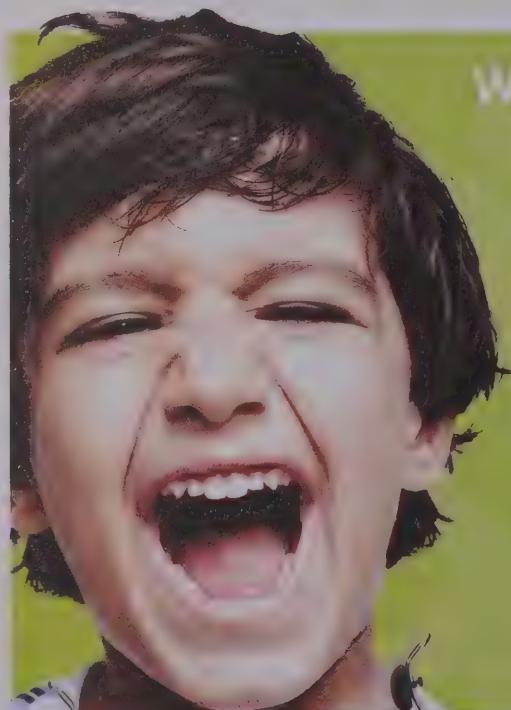
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Stepping up to parenting

Libby Webber ponders the life-enhancing side of becoming a disabled step-parent



STUART WEBBER

I didn't have any preconceived ideas about what being a stepmother would be like. I don't have children of my own, and when I fell in love with Stu, Matt's father, I realised immediately that the two of them came as a package. You only had to see them together to realise the depth of the bond they have.

Matt's brother Thomas was disabled, and so me being a wheelchair-user is nothing out of the ordinary

to him. In fact I think it's helped us to bond, because Matt likes to look out for me just as he used to for Thomas – making sure the path is clear for my wheelchair, for example.

He was nine years old when we met. I needn't have been nervous about it because we got on well from our first weekend together. Matt was upset after an argument with his dad, and we had the first of our 'Matt and Libby talks'; private

conversations when Matt could offload to someone who isn't a parent or teacher. I remember feeling stunned and privileged that he would trust me with his feelings so soon.

Ironically, as my feelings for Matt have deepened, it's become more difficult to be that slightly detached confidante for him. I feel more like a parent now than a friend. Our relationship is more complex too, but I hope that Matt will always

feel he can talk to me about his troubles.

Part of me would love Matt to be my biological child, not just because I don't have my own children, but also because I love him for the funny, caring, troubled and fascinating person he is. I was thrilled when he introduced me to his mates in the school playground. I rang Stu afterwards in a flood of tears, because I'd never thought that I would be a "school run mum", and wasn't it wonderful!

Stu's bottom line has always been that we're a family, all four of us – dad, mum, stepmum and Matt. That can be difficult because there are times when I disagree with decisions, and while I'm happy to give my opinion, I don't have the final say on what's right for Matt because I'm not his mum. Fortunately, Wendy, Matt's mother and I get on well, and that can only be to Matt's benefit.

Before I met Matt, I'd never have described myself as being particularly maternal, but becoming his stepmum has brought out all the mothering instincts I never knew I had.



Bluffing it out in Dublin

Two deaf poker players, Bassim Baz and Nick Gregory put their cards on the table for **Cathy Reay**

Off the back of an invitation via the popular social networking site Facebook, deaf Londoners Bassim Baz (known as Baz) and Nick Gregory travelled to Dublin last October to attend the annual Deepstack poker tournament, held by the Irish deaf club.

The club has always been a strong link to deaf history in Ireland and a key hub for deaf people to socialise.

“I’ve been before and had a really good time. I thought it would be fun for us to go as a large group,” explains Baz.

“We have friends, we play poker with regularly so we got them all together and went over; we wanted to test how good we all really were!

“For us it was refreshing to go to an event where there were other deaf people, but it wasn’t all about that, it was just about getting together and having a good time.”

Once they arrived in Dublin, Baz and Nick took the opportunity to play a few practise hands to suss out



JAMIE TROUNCE

Nick Gregory (left) and Bassim Baz

the competition before the big tournament the next day.

“It was our first time meeting a lot of the people there over the weekend, and it enabled us to judge everyone’s skills before the big competition. I wanted to know what I was up against!” says Nick.

As they were making friends, Baz and Nick realised that a number of European visitors had registered to play. Baz says: “Lots of deaf people play poker regularly in Scandinavia and there were quite a few Swedes there. It was really interesting to learn about their culture. Apparently deaf poker tournaments are a bit of a thing in Sweden!”

Sweden, like any other non-English

speaking country, has its own sign language in the same way that it has its own speaking language, but Baz says that wasn’t a problem. “Most deaf people know some international sign language and through gestures or miming, it’s easy to understand and communication really wasn’t a problem. It’s funny because a lot of the people we met knew English speaking language as a second language!”

After a pizza or two and some well-earned rest, the gambling duo was up bright and early the next morning to start the real fun – the tournament.

“There were a lot of people around and a great buzzing atmosphere,” says Baz. “A few of my friends had to play against each other but I ended up playing with a table of strangers, which was actually really cool.”

“It all felt really professional, we got free food and there was a dealer on each table. About 15-20 minutes in everyone started clapping because the first person had lost his game already.”

The 70-odd deaf and hard of



IRISHDEAFTPOKER.COM

hearing poker players continued playing for around 12 hours, with people dropping off slowly until the final two players battled it out for the cash prize of 1,300 euros. Though Nick and Baz were out of the game long before, they entertained themselves by playing free-for-all games downstairs with the public.

Baz says: "I joined a cash poker game where there were both deaf and hearing people playing. A little into

the game a man told me not to sign to the other deaf people because hearing people might think we were cheating. I said I could think the same thing when you're chatting to your friends!"

Despite Baz's altercation, he says that he and Nick befriended many of the people they met through the deaf club.

"It was a really unique opportunity," says Nick.

"Hearing people chatter away and you miss out on things, but when deaf

people are playing you have to take time out to have a conversation as you're concentrating on your cards. It meant that I could understand what everyone was saying so it was much more enjoyable."

"We'll definitely go again next year," adds Baz. "I just need to brush up on my skills a bit before then!" ■

- For more information on the Irish Deepstack poker tournament visit www.irishdeafpoker.com

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local knowledge

Walk the walk of Southwark pride

Mental health and the past walk hand in hand as **Kelly Mullan** takes a toddle through the history of histrionics in south London



Hogarth's take on madness: the rake in Bedlam

Physical exercise, community involvement, and having a laugh: three ingredients recommended for good mental health now available to the public in the form of the Largactyl Shuffle.

The Lambeth Walk's newest neighbour, the Largactyl Shuffle is a regular disability-themed guided tour of Southwark in south-east London. It is the toddling brainchild of Cooltan Arts, a creative collective of survivors of

mental distress.

Cooltan's founder and Chief Executive, Michelle Baharier, says: "Largactyl is a drug to treat mental illness that causes the appearance of physical impairment; it makes you walk like you need a hip replacement. We used to mess around doing silly walks as another way to turn a painful situation into humour."

After being "medically retired" from her job as a play worker Michelle was unable, due to disability

discrimination, to get back into work so she started up Cooltan in a squat in an old Suntan lotion factory.

Several premises and incarnations later, Cooltan now runs a variety of arts workshops and ongoing projects and is blazing a trail with the innovative Largactyl Shuffle.

Michelle explains the thinking behind the walk: "Treating mental illness is relatively new. Before, people were locked away. Southwark is steeped in this history and we wanted to explore it."

Walkers meet at the Maudsley hospital and follow the winding trail of crumbs dropped by basket-cases from throughout the area's rich mental health history.

The notorious "Bedlam", now the Bethlem Royal Hospital, once had a site in Southwark, and did you know ... that Charlie Chaplin, late exponent of the funny walk, hailed from Southwark and that his mother was in an asylum? And that it was on the streets of Southwark that Edwardian do-gooder Octavia Hill pioneered her methods still used by modern social workers? And

that pioneering electrical experimenter Michael Faraday lived here, close to the famous Maudsley hospital where ECT (electro-convulsive therapy) is still practised today?

Treating mental illness is relatively new. Before, people were locked away. Southwark is steeped in this history and we wanted to explore it

Michelle sees the Largactyl Shuffle as part of Cooltan's ongoing work of highlighting and creatively campaigning against disability discrimination. The idea is that as people walk and talk, the barriers between the guides, the participants using mental health services, and members of the public on the walk begin to break down. Physical, mental and social well-being are all enhanced, keeping Southwark residents "healthily mental".

- For details of the next walk see www.cooltanarts.org.uk

CONTACT US

Do you know of an innovative, small-scale, pilot project, ideally one run by disabled people themselves?

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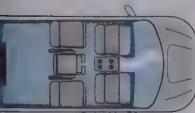
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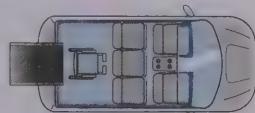
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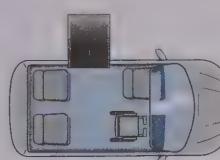
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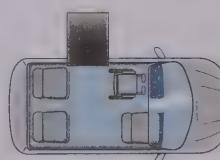
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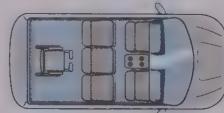
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Agnes Fletcher has visited Cyprus, an island which is a glorious, grand mosaic – where manifestations of an extraordinary past and a vibrant present are laid out across the country in a rich and colourful pattern.

Cyprus is a stepping stone to three continents – Africa, Asia and Europe; a stopping place between east and west. Its rich history, preserved in many World Heritage Sites, spans 10,000 years and includes rule by Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, French, Venetians, Turks, Greeks and British.

Since 1974, the island has been divided into the Turkish-sponsored Turkish Republic of North Cyprus and the Greek Cypriot-governed Republic of Cyprus in the south. They share Nicosia as their capital.

The south is urbanised, though still influenced by the Orthodox Church, with the cities of Larnaka, Nicosia, Pafos, Agia Napa and Limassol being busy centres. In the Turkish north, an international boycott has affected both tourism and economic development. It is far less affluent, more sparsely populated and Islam is the main religion.

The third largest island in the Mediterranean, despite being a popular tourist destination, Cyprus is still unspoiled. It has something for just about everyone: beautiful beaches, breathtaking mountains, museums and archeological sites,

Did you know?

Cyprus is the mythical birthplace of the Greek goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite.





From top clockwise: rugged coastline at Pafos; historic sites Lefkosa Musuem and Lefkara

championship golf courses, lively nightlife, wine-tasting and luxury hotels and spas.

The cult of Aphrodite, the ancient Greek mythological goddess of love and beauty, was born here and the island was the first country the apostles Paul and Barnabas visited on their mission to spread Christianity. When Cyprus became part of the Byzantine Empire, art and architecture flourished, especially in the 12th century – and much of it survives.

It's said that if you simply scratch the surface of the island you will unearth a relic from the past. All of the island's main cities have an archaeological museum, with the main one in Lefkosa.

Alongside the culture, nature provides an enormous variety of plant and animal life. The scenery includes rugged coastline, sand and pebble beaches, rocky shores, sun-baked plains and mountain forests – bring a paintbrush or a camera! For bird-watchers, Cyprus is on the migration path between Africa, Asia and Europe.

Because it is such a popular tourist destination, in recent years facilities for disabled people in the south have improved. However, relatively few public buildings, shops or visitor attractions have ramps so access can be very difficult for wheelchair-users. Many museums are in older buildings without lifts. Access to archaeological sites is also difficult. Pavements in towns and villages (where they exist) are often uneven. The situation is echoed but to a greater extreme in the poorer Turkish north.

In terms of attitudes, Cypriots can seem a bit complacent when it comes to disability. Cypriot civic society has

Did you know?

Today, the country has a population of around 700,000 – but attracts about 2.4 million tourists a year, due to its friendly native people and over 300 days of sunshine a year.

not done enough as yet to create wheelchair access in its streets and public places. However, Cypriots themselves are friendly and helpful and there is a general willingness to help overcome the access hurdles.

Only a few museums and archaeological sites in the south (and none in the north) offer Braille or audio guides for people with visual impairments or induction loops.

The scenery includes rugged coastline, sand and pebble beaches, rocky shores, sun-baked plains and mountain forests – bring a paintbrush or a camera

Don't let that put you off. In the larger hotels in the south, you'll find a reasonable level of wheelchair access – though do check things like the width of bathroom doors in advance. Prices are economical compared to the UK.

There are a number of companies that specialise in holidays for disabled people – renting equipment, providing airport transfers and excursions in adapted transfer vehicles, accessible accommodation and whatever personal support you may need during a stay in Cyprus.

A keen ambassador for exploring Cyprus as a disabled person is Chris Neophytou. Chris has used a wheelchair since his late 20s and created the first holiday complex

specially designed for wheelchair-users and their families in Polis, one of the most attractive and fastest growing seaside resorts. Located on the north-west coast of Cyprus (though still in the southern Republic), Polis is close to the Akamas Peninsula and the harbour village Latchi.

As Chris says: "I knew from experience how difficult it is for wheelchair-users to find a place they could go to for a holiday; a place where they felt safe and where they had a sense of freedom. I used my own experience and knowledge as a disabled person to create the perfect holiday place: that's the key really, giving people pleasure, but within a safe and friendly environment.

"For those seeking the thrill of a new adventure, parasailing, snorkelling and scuba diving are all possible, as is swimming in the Med. We have a glass-bottomed boat with a ramp and hoist to get people into the sea. Here in Cyprus, almost anything is possible."

Polis has relatively good pedestrian areas and there is little traffic, so it's safe to use the road wherever the pavement is not suitable for wheelchairs. Many public buildings,



Disabled visitors can access the unique view from a glass-bottomed boat

like the archaeological museum and some restaurants have adapted access for disabled visitors.

For the pastier of us Brits, especially those like me with arthritis, the weather in Cyprus is fantastic all year round. The island enjoys an intense Mediterranean climate of hot dry summers, starting in mid-May and lasting until mid-September, and rainy, mild winters from November to mid-March. With almost year-round clear skies and sunshine, daylight ranges from 9.8 hours in December to 14.5 hours in June. Even in the depths of winter, temperatures range from 18°C

inland to about 14°C on the coast. During the hottest months of July and August, temperatures range between 29°C on the central plain to 22°C on the inland Troodos Mountains.

While southern Cyprus makes a relatively easy tourist destination now, there are big plans afoot to improve what it offers to tourists. There are positive signs of a good outcome on reunification of the island and a massive development project to transform the port of Larnaca into the eastern Mediterranean's leading cruise ship hub. A new airport for Larnaka will be completed in November 2009.

In the next few years, there will be a massive expansion of holiday homes for sale and rent, new hotels and new facilities – although the government has learned the lessons of Spain and has careful restrictions on what can be built where. Recent access laws provide the hope that, for disabled people, Cyprus will soon be complete as a holiday paradise. ■



Golden beaches at Agia Napa

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Did you know?

Richard the Lionheart captured the island in 1191 during the Third Crusade, using it as a supply base from which to fight the Saracens.

FACT FILE

Getting there:

EU passport holders may cross from the south of the island to the north via the pedestrians-only Ledra Palace crossing point in Nicosia, or via one of the vehicle crossing points (at Agios, Dometios, Pergamos and Stravilia).

Getting around:

As a member of the European Union, the Republic of Cyprus follows European norms. English is widely spoken.

To visit north Cyprus, EU visitors only need a valid passport but, to avoid being refused entry on later visits to the south, passports should be stamped on a separate loose-sheet of paper.

The euro is the currency in the south. The north uses the Turkish lira.

Accommodation and services:
You'll find reasonable rates and a variety of accommodation to suit different pockets in Cyprus – but check the access details carefully in advance.

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For equipment hire such as electric hoists, manual and electric wheelchairs, scooters, shower chairs and commodes to hire by the week:
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Further information:

- Cyprus Organisation for the Deaf, tel: 00 357 22 356767.
- (Republic of) Cyprus Tourism Organisation, tel: 00 357 22 691100. Website: www.visitcyprus.com
Provides a leaflet with information on facilities for wheelchair users.
- North Cyprus Tourism Centre, tel: 020 7631 1930. Email: info@northcyprus.co.uk Website: www.northcyprus.co.uk
- www.disability-cyprus.com (company offering accommodation, equipment and support)
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Paul Carter checks out a satellite navigation unit that does more than simply tell you where to go

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But as all disabled drivers will know, getting to a destination is often only half the problem.

As Helen Smith illustrated in the last issue of *Disability Now*, finding an accessible parking space near to where you want to visit can often be a struggle.

One product riding to the rescue is the BBNav from Navevo, billed as the first “dedicated blue badge solution” and specifically designed to make journey planning easier for disabled drivers

and those transporting disabled people.

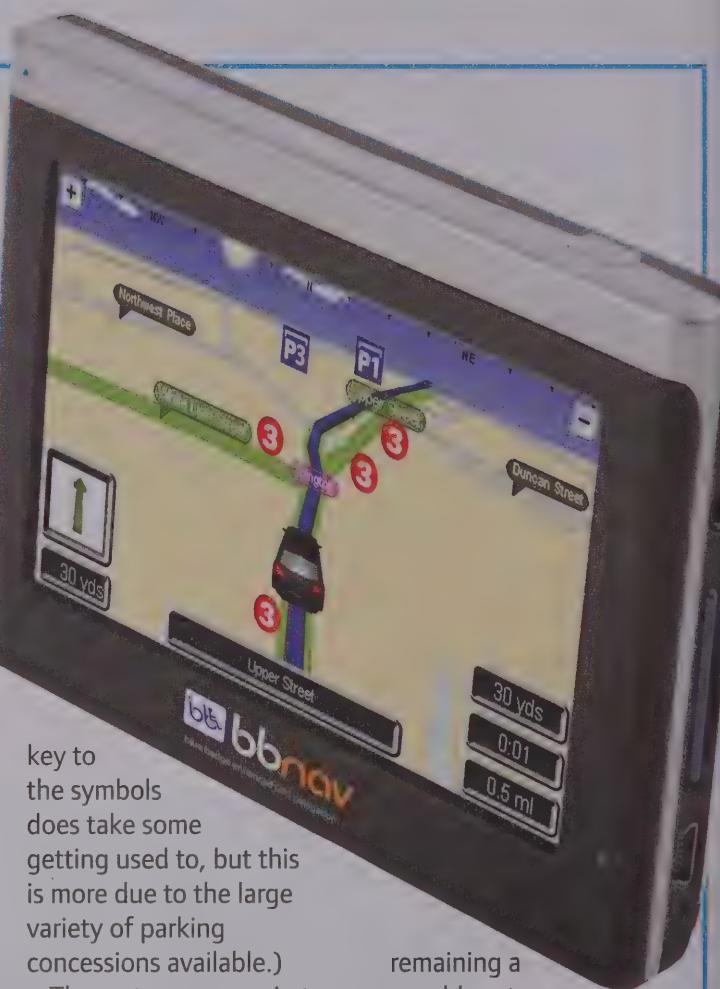
The BBNav comes pre-loaded with information on over 10,000 blue badge on-street parking bays, along with details of over 3,500 accessible carparks provided by PIE (Public Information Exchange).

In addition, the unit can direct users to over 20,000 points of interest for blue badge holders, such as accessible accommodation, accessible toilets and Shopmobility schemes.

The BBNav stands up well to scrutiny.

The on-screen Navteq maps are sharp and bright and its voice instructions are as clear and concise as other sat-nav systems.

Carparks and parking bays are marked directly on the maps with various symbols. (Admittedly the



key to the symbols does take some getting used to, but this is more due to the large variety of parking concessions available.)

The system can run in two modes – easy and advanced – with the former offering fewer and simpler options for the novice user.

One area of potential difficulty is that while the unit can be operated by touch alone, it works better when you use a stylus to navigate the various choices. Touch can be less responsive and more likely to result in the wrong number or letter being entered.

The BBNav is a versatile and useful tool for travellers who need access information on their destinations, while

remaining a capable sat-nav system in its own right.

The downside is that with a recommended retail price of £199.99, it's definitely at the premium end of the market.

That fact alone may place it out of the reach of the many disabled motorists whom it has the undoubtedly potential to help most.

INFORMATION

BBNav is priced at £199.99 inc VAT and is available from www.bbnav.co.uk and selected retail stores



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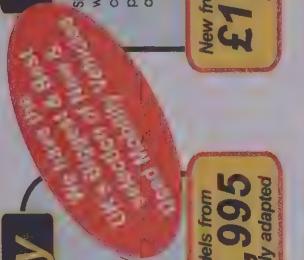
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Making numbers count



Helen Smith says new number recognition technology could take the access hassle out of car parks

Many severely disabled people just can not use carparks. This is because they do not have the strength or dexterity to use pay-on-foot machines, take tickets out at barriers or put coins in slots. This is more of an issue as councils that once offered free parking in their carparks for blue badge holders are now scrapping this concession and this means disabled people having to use payment machines.

My argument is not about whether disabled people should or shouldn't pay but whether we can or can not park

This issue is a problem in privately run carparks. Unlike councils, they do not have to meet the disability equality duty which is a legal duty on all public sector organisations to promote equality of opportunity for disabled

people. However, privately run carparks shouldn't get away with doing nothing as they still have an obligation under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

I have spent a lot of time writing to councils, who are either considering introducing charges or have already done so, informing them of all the issues. Peterborough City Council, who are planning on charging, say they "will not introduce a charge until the carparks are fully able to be used by disabled

people through the use of specially adapted ticket machines". Unfortunately there aren't any ticket machines I know of which meet this criteria. Great Yarmouth Borough Council who require disabled people to pay at ticket machines say they "would be sympathetic" if anyone got a ticket because they physically couldn't pay. I personally would rather not get a ticket in the first place!

But even councils who don't charge badge holders



Parking can be about more than just finding an accessible space

can still prevent people using their carparks. If the access is by taking a ticket at a barrier then some disabled people can't get in.

The good news, though, is there is an answer to these problems. I recently paid a visit to Colchester where the council was testing out its newly installed automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) machinery. I was able to register my details online, and as I drew up at the car park the barrier lifted automatically. ANPR has already been introduced in Newbury and has recently been installed in Cambridge. These councils currently allow blue badge

holders free parking, but if that were to change payment could be collected online or by phone at a later date.

So my argument is not about whether disabled people should or shouldn't pay but whether we can or can not park. Local authorities and other carpark managers must recognise that there are disabled drivers who can not use the current parking technology. They therefore need to review and amend their payment arrangements and rules accordingly, and insure that they are meeting their disability equality duty.

On the buses



Disability Now's routemeister **Paul Carter** looks to the past and an icon of London which could make a comeback in the future

Mayor of London Boris Johnson has unveiled the winning entries in a competition to design a new bus for London, based on the now-defunct Routemaster.

The iconic bus, with its "hop-on, hop-off" design, was removed from service in December 2005 after nearly 50 years, largely due to its inaccessibility to disabled people, especially wheelchair-users.

However, one of the Mayor's key election manifesto pledges was to reintroduce Routemasters back onto the streets of the capital, incorporating new access features for disabled passengers and environmentally friendly technology.

In conjunction with Transport for London (TfL), Mr Johnson launched the 'New Bus For London' competition shortly after taking office, to find designs for a new

accessible Routemaster.

The outcome resulted in joint winners, with a design by Capoco Design Ltd sharing the first prize with a collaborative design by leading architects Foster and Partners and motor manufacturer Aston Martin.

As per the requirements of the competition, both designs incorporated features to allow use of the buses by disabled people, with the Capoco design featuring a low-level flat floor, while the

Foster/Aston Martin entry contained a central side-loading ramp with a dedicated wheelchair area.

However, it was difficult to judge the accessibility from the design plans alone, as neither of the final designs is likely to be the version that makes it to production.

TfL said that the best elements of all the submitted entries will be passed on to bus manufacturers to develop into final design proposals, before being subject to a competitive tendering process, with the first prototype of the new bus being on the road in 2011.

Boris Johnson said: "I know that, like me, Londoners will be waiting eagerly to see how these ideas evolve into the final design that will appear on our roads."

One area of concern appears to be the lack of consultation so far with disabled people themselves as to what features they would like to see in a 21st century bus.

When asked by *Disability Now* if disabled people would play a role in the design process of the new Routemaster, David Brown, managing director of surface transport, said they "would be foolish not to," and that disabled people's groups would be consulted as the project developed.

Second-class honours

Eighteen Paralympians who claimed gold medals in Beijing have been recognised in the New Year's honours list. But there is controversy over whether they have been recognised equally with their Olympic counterparts.

The most notable name on the list was schoolgirl Eleanor Simmonds, who at 13 is thought to be the youngest person ever to be honoured by being awarded an MBE.

Eleven-time Paralympic gold medallist Dave Roberts, and Lee Pearson, who won three golds for the third successive Games, were both made CBEs, while other names on the list included cyclist Sarah Storey (OBE), swimmer Jody Cundy (MBE) and wheelchair racer David Weir (MBE).

However, the athletes' recognition was overshadowed by a row over inequality, as only 17 of the 35 Paralympic gold medalists received awards, in contrast to the Olympic squad, where every gold medallist was recognised in some form.

ParalympicsGB chairman, Tim Reddish, said he was delighted that the athletes had been recognised and received awards, praising their "magnificent



Paralympic and Olympic athletes celebrate together – but have they been honoured equally?

achievements".

However, he criticised the decision to omit some of the gold medallists.

"We are very disappointed that not all the Beijing 2008 Paralympic gold medallists could be recognised but we look forward to more athletes being honoured in the future."

The list of honours recipients from the sporting field is initially drawn up by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), before being passed on to the Cabinet Office.

But there is confusion over who is responsible for the apparent disparity in this year's honours.

A Cabinet Office spokeswoman told *Disability Now*:

"All the decisions are made by the sports committee based on the factors in front of them. They are career-wide and the parameters are based on criteria approved by the associations, in this case the British Paralympic Association".

She said that they were unable to comment on individual cases.

However, this version of events is denied by ParalympicsGB.

A spokeswoman told *Disability Now*: "ParalympicsGB did not have a role in drawing up this list, we were informed about who would be on the list and told of the approach DCMS had adopted in drawing up the list, but we

were not involved in the decision-making process and did not endorse the approach taken by DCMS."

Dame Tanni Grey Thompson, who is a member of the sports committee, had reportedly criticised the fact that Paralympians "needed to multi-medal" to stand a chance of being recognised.

However, she has since denied believing that the honours system discriminates against disabled athletes.

A Cabinet Office spokeswoman said that Dame Tanni's comments had been "taken out of context, and were not what she was reported to have said".

Full list of honours for those involved in Paralympic sport

Commanders of the Order of the British Empire (CBE)

Lee Pearson – para-dressage Paralympic triple gold medallist

David Roberts – Paralympic swimming gold medallist (four in Beijing)

Officers of the Order of the British Empire (OBE)

Ellen Hunter – double Paralympic gold medal-winning cycling pilot rider

Darren Kenny – four-time (in Beijing) Paralympic cycling gold medallist

Phil Lane – ParalympicsGB Chief Executive

Aileen McGlynn – double Paralympic cycling gold medallist

Tim Reddish – British Disability Swimming National Performance Director

Sarah Storey – double Paralympic cycling gold medallist

Members of the Order of the British Empire (MBE)

Mark Bristow – two-time Paralympic gold medal-winning cyclist

Sophie Christiansen – para-dressage double gold medallist

Jody Cundy – Paralympic cycling double gold medallist

Anne Dunham – double Para-dressage gold medallist

Anthony Kappes – double Paralympic gold medallist for cycling

Billy Pye – Head Disability Swimming Coach and coach to Eleanor Simmonds and Dave Roberts.

Simon Richardson – double Paralympic cycling gold medallist

Eleanor Simmonds – two-time Paralympic gold medallist and the youngest Briton to win an individual Paralympic gold

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Romancing the medical model



Chirpy optimist and Mills & Boon author Kate Hardy defends her genre with such vigour that cynic **Kelly Mullan** can't help but be charmed

It's as improbable as any Mills & Boon plot: uppity feminist from *Disability Now* meets starry-eyed romance author, sneers at her formulaic work but ends up seeing merit in it. Could romantic fiction have some relevance to the lives of women in the 21st century?

Kate Hardy reckons it does. "I get great feedback from readers. I handle contemporary issues like breast cancer, divorce, rape and disability. I write weepy books with feel-good happy endings. One reader said that if she's having a bad day, she'll read one of my books and

feel like the world is a good place after all."

Hardy has a hearing impairment and Katrina, the protagonist of her 39th book, *The Children's Doctor's Special Proposal*, is deaf too. "Katrina has been rejected because of her impairment. She was made to feel incomplete and that she wouldn't make a good mother, but the hero convinces her otherwise.

"She falls for the hero when he plays the cello and she listens to the vibrations. I got the idea from trying to play the guitar as my hearing loss progressed; I'd get into contorted positions to feel the vibrations.

"I don't think people are aware of deafness as an issue. It's frustrating when people underestimate my intelligence if I'm having trouble lip-reading them.

"I didn't realise I was lip-reading until my impairment was diagnosed in my early 20s. Now that I have a hearing aid I get spooked by things like birdsong. I'll say, 'what's that?' and my kids'll say, 'that's a pigeon.'"

Hardy writes for the medical strand of Mills & Boon. She explains that she took her interest in all things medical from her

mother who was a nurse. "Hospitals are places of high drama and the stakes are high. It suits the need for a romance novel to be intense."

Although unfamiliar with the medical or the social model of disability, Hardy says: "It annoys me when deafness is written with a capital D. I'm the same as anyone else. There needs to be integration so we can educate people about disability. I do get angry, though, if I'm provoked by the way I'm treated and I will tell people off."

At the risk of getting a telling off: although today's Mills & Boon is more progressive than its predecessors (the women can be go-getting doctors and there are disabled characters), their attraction remains a mystery to many. But then romance needs mystery to survive, such as the mystery of how Mills & Boon books are so successful when no one will admit to reading them.

• *The Children's Doctor's Special Proposal* (Harlequin Mills & Boon) is on sale from 6 March.

BOOKS

The great and the good

Defying Disability – The Lives and Legacies of Nine Disabled Leaders, by Mary Wilkinson

This is an engaging and slightly edgy read by the former and founding editor of *Disability Now*.

It presents some of the twisted complexities of recent crip politics seen through the personal life stories of nine people of challenging embodiment.

These are not simply people of flawed limbs or excessive social modelism but of brilliantly powerful minds who have defied institutions.

They have worked to bring about sustainable change to those social standards that persist in rejecting disabled people.

It is a unique recent historical account of disabled people who have been highly influential.

But one attraction of this book is the sense of the everyday experience arising from the text. What becomes apparent is that it's not all about disability politics.

It moves through Bert Massie's cheeky Scouse public servitude, Jack Ashley's socialist politicing, Rachel Hurst's unrelenting activism and challenge to ableism, Tom Shakespeare's

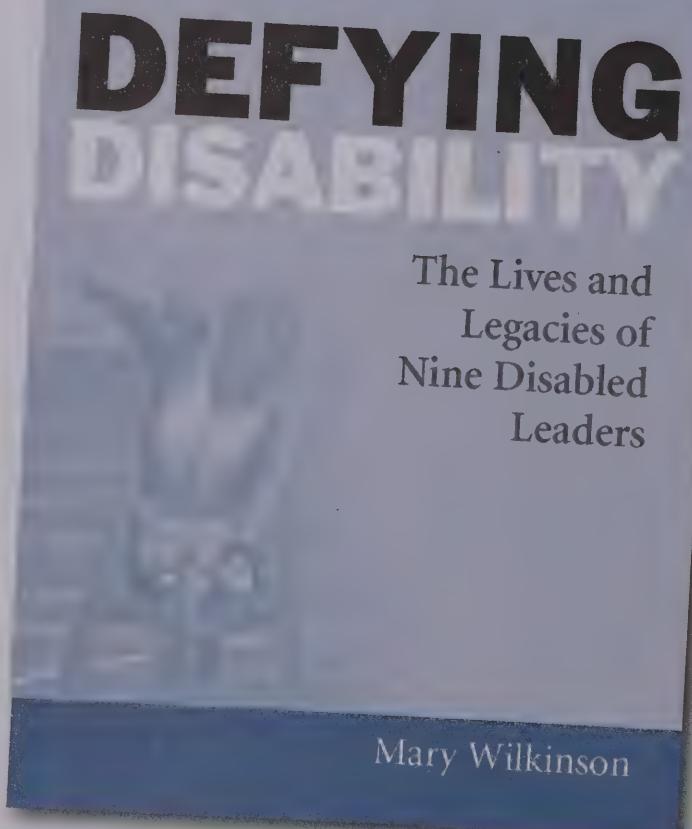
edgy art and critical academia, Phil Friend's enterprise and smoking of the "wrong type of cigarettes" (p107), Peter White's pub piano sing-alongs and journalism, Mat Fraser's bad-boy punk performances, Andrew Lee's speaking up and campaigning, and Tanni Grey Thompson's golden athleticism.

Defying Disability is clearly both personal and political.

Written in a style that offers at the same time factual biography and personal narrative, this book will be of great interest to a wide audience.

If also, like me, you are relatively new to owning your impairment and political identity as a disabled person, then this book will get you up to speed with aspects of the movement's history that you may not have been aware of.

Those with critical leanings may assert that the current collection is representative somehow of the emergence of a "crip bourgeoisie". However, this is something that Mary



Mary Wilkinson

Wilkinson is well aware of and covers in the introduction, along with the issue of the gender and ethnicity imbalance, which she says she would now address more directly if planning the book again.

A lot of work has gone into capturing the detail of key moments that shaped the current disability equality scene, as well as an intimate touch that lets you into, for example, Rachel

Hurst's theatrical background and Mat Fraser's cage fighting and time spent on the rubber scene.

In all, Mary Wilkinson has written an insightful book that works on a variety of levels.

Sid Baily

Defying Disability – The Lives and Legacies of Nine Disabled Leaders, by Mary Wilkinson. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, Paperback £17.99



Time to Get Equal Week 2009

Time to Get Equal aims to build a mass movement of disabled people and non-disabled people fighting against disability. We believe all disabled people should have the same human rights as everyone else.

Last year over 120 campaigning and awareness-raising events took place across England and Wales in Scope's Time to Get Equal Week.

Be a part of it this year – put the dates in your diary now:

Monday 8 – Sunday 14 June

For information on how you can get involved:

Email ttge2009@scope.org.uk

Telephone **020 7619 7370**

Or go online at www.timetogetequal.org.uk

Scope is a national disability organisation whose focus is people with cerebral palsy (cp). Scope's mission is to drive the change to make our society the first where disabled people achieve equality.



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For disabled people achieving equality.

Model worker



Steelfixer **Steven Noonan** (pictured, above) built roller-coasters but after an Acquired Brain Injury in a motorcycle accident he discovered a talent for model making and now runs his own film and animation company, Carn Media, based in Co. Derry

had a motorcycle accident in 1996 and was told by doctors: "Avoid stress, Steven: take a back seat in life, keep coming to the day centre and vegetate." Pardon the expression but I said: "Fuck that!" I was passionate about getting myself sorted out.

A friend said I should have a go at art therapy so I began making silly wee heads from bits 'n bobs of Blu-Tack and found I had a knack for it. Then I got some FIMO bakeable clay and made a wee guy holding a pint of Guinness and local pubs got interested.

I made motorcycle trophies and continually enjoyed it and got a sense of satisfaction from it. I heard about Belgian model-maker Joel Simon who was working in Belfast and began working with him on animations for Ulster TV and ads. I began by doing two days a week, then went full time and then started my first business called This2That, facilitating animation workshops in schools.

I applied to the Millennium Awards and was given a bursary of £8,000 which bought me my first camera and computer. There was a high number of applicants but I got short-listed because of all the recommendations I had from people who recognised I had a talent and needed an opportunity.

It's been a hell of a struggle to get this far. Ambition and drive keep me going, and I've had a lot of support from my family and

my wife. Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) is very much a subterranean thing to have. People can't see that you have a disability and then if you tell them, they can get very condescending.

I'm a stickler. I go beyond the extra mile and people think, "that guy's efficient!"

I have to prove to the world that I have a value and can compete with the average person. I can physically burn myself out, racing from Draperstown to Maghera to Belfast to Dublin to get filming done. My sleeping pattern is ridiculous. I go at double speed so I have to stop at times. It's nearly destroyed me.

I started with nothing and now I have my own studio. I bring in people from project to project but mostly I run the whole show myself.

There's something creative in all of us. I've sat with people who are negative, negative, negative but I say "quit the bullshit!"

STEVEN NOONAN: CAREER PATH

- 1988 – Left St. Colum's High School, Draperstown with 6 GCSE's. Worked as a jukebox technician, then as a steelfixer in European theme parks
- 1996 – Disabled in motorcycle accident and attended the Cedar Foundation day centre in Ballymena. Started modelmaking as self-prescribed rehab therapy
- Started working with Joel Simon of Flickerpix Animation Studios
- Received Millennium Award of £8,000
- Started This2That, delivering animation workshops
- 2004 – managing a rural-based multimedia business, Carn Media Ltd

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Cont'd see pg 71

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And if you're not seeking work then why not become a Leonard Cheshire Disability Volunteer. As a disabled person your experience and insight will be particularly valued.

If you're interested in changing attitudes to disability and supporting other disabled people then visit www.LCDisability.org

Image reproduced from the "Creature Discomforts" disability awareness campaign www.CreatureDiscomforts.org

Leonard Cheshire Disability charity no: 218186 (England & Wales) and no: SCO05117 (Scotland)



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Renault Kangoo Expression 1.6 Petrol Automatic DK57CGZ, 12,500 miles, Metallic Silver, Registered November 2007, 3 seats with air-con, lowered floor with Torspring Ramp and Winch. Hi Spec. **£10,950**

Toyota Hiace 2.5 D-4D Diesel Manual DA57LRE, 14,200 miles, Metallic Blue. The New 2007 Face Lift Model, Registered January 2008. Well specified model with 5 seats. Rear access ramp with winch. **£14,750**

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WARNING - We have been warned about a scam involving people from overseas who say they want to buy a product and who offer to pay using cheques, Western Union money transfers and certified cheques. Although no *Disability Now* readers to our knowledge have been hit by this, please be particularly wary of accepting cheques from overseas. For more information, visit the Metropolitan Police website.

Appointment of members to the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee

The Secretary of State for Transport is seeking individual nominations and applications for membership to the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee (DPTAC).

The Committee

The Government set up DPTAC under the Transport Act 1985 to advise the Government on the transport and mobility needs of disabled people.

The full Committee meets quarterly. Successful applicants should expect to devote around 1 day a month to attending meetings, and around 1 day each month to the general work of DPTAC.

Key skills

Those appointed to the Committee will be people with relevant experience in both transport and disability issues, gained either as a professional working in those fields, or as a transport consumer.

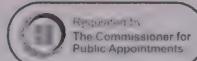
Members will be expected to apply that experience and to take a broad national perspective across the full range of transport issues affecting disabled people. They will also be experienced in Committee work at local, regional or national level.

The specific competencies that Members will be required to meet are set out in the 'competency framework' in the application pack.

Appointments

At least half of the Committee's twenty members must be disabled people. In making appointments, the Secretary of State for Transport

Department for
Transport



will also want to ensure that the membership represents the widest range of transport and disability interests, skills and experience. Ministers make all appointments on a personal basis; members do not represent the interests of particular organisations that they may happen to belong to.

There are plans for Members to be remunerated for their work on the Committee, and further details will be provided in the application pack. In addition, in accordance with the civil service code, the Department will reimburse travel, subsistence and other reasonable expenses (including child care/dependants' care and a contribution towards communication costs).

The appointment will be for three years from 1 July 2009.

You can obtain further information, including details on how to apply, from Sue Proberts, Dept. for Transport, Accessibility & Equalities Unit at 2/23, Great Minster House, 76 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DR, by telephone on 020 7944 8035, or by email to sue.proberts@dft.gsi.gov.uk. Details are also available on the web at www.dft.gov.uk or www.dptac.gov.uk

Final applications must be submitted by close on 13 March 2009.

As an equal opportunities employer we welcome applications from candidates regardless of their ethnic origin, religious belief, gender, sexuality, disability, marital status, age, race, and employment status.

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You can find out more about us, and our work, on our website www.dfid.gov.uk. You'll also find information about specific vacancies, opportunities, and an electronic application on the site.



DFID
www.dfid.gov.uk

Newham Independent living Project is looking for a consultant/s

In Brief: Newham Independent living Project are a group of local user led Disabled People's Organisations in Newham. We have come together to work in partnership with London Borough of Newham to set up a user led self-directed support service for the borough with the long term idea that this will become part of a future user led Centre for Independent Living. We are looking for a consultant or consultants to support our Coalition to become constituted (set up in law), put together a business plan and agree ways to use the capital monies we have from the Department of Health. (Capital monies is money that can only be spent on buildings and equipment). The consultant or consultants must have a good understanding of the social model of disability, experience of using services and be able to work in accessible ways. There is up to £35,000 plus £10,000 in costs for this work which must be finished by the end of 12 months. We are also waiting to hear about some more funding up to £32,000 plus £8,000 costs for the same project and if we get this we would like the same consultant or consultants to also do this work.

Closing date for applications is 12 noon Monday 9th February 2009.

If you would like to talk about this project in more detail, please contact: Brian Stocker Manager Newham People First Tel: 02075110022

This information is also available to download in easy-read (with or without pictures) and large print from our website www.newhampeoplefirst.org Braille and audio versions available on request.


Office for Disability Issues
 HM Government

To apply, please visit
www.capitaras.co.uk/odi

For further information on the role please contact Colin Welch at Capita Resourcing;

01256 383611. If you do not have access to the internet or need to make your application in a different format please contact Megan Dearden on
01256 383663.

Closing date: 9 February 2009.

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Director of the Office for Disability Issues
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Influencing at the highest levels, you will lead a cross-government strategy that tackles the issues affecting disabled people throughout the country. You will be central to advising ministers on government policy for disabled people and, ultimately, your passion and drive will help us achieve our vision of equality of opportunity for disabled people by 2025.

It's a challenge that requires someone who can strike a balance between strategic thinking and delivery. Someone who can lead and build consensus around real change, and who knows how to get the best out of people from different organisations and backgrounds. Someone who understands the barriers faced by disabled people and is committed to breaking them down.

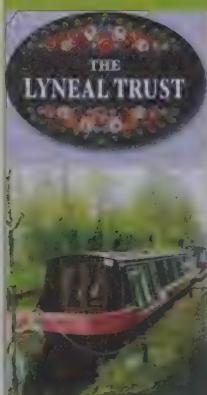
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Website: www.lyneal-trust.org.uk

email: pushkar.trivedi@shropshire.gov.uk

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e-mail: office@crathieholidays.org.uk



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Designed by wheelchair user and recommended by wheelchair users: "I love this place!" – BW (Australia). "Perfect... let's keep this secret, we want to come back!" – S&N (UK).

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AS SEEN & admired in the queue at Naidex NEC near Birmingham in 2008! iGLIDE, manual assist wheelchair with spare battery. 4 years old, new CPU six months ago, tyres will need replacing but have infills. This has been a 'second' wheelchair for use with my car. I have had to change to a powered wheelchair. £500 & arrange collection. Tel: 07850 715782 or email: med2swan@hotmail.com

BALDER FINESSE F280

powered wheelchair – tilt chair, 2003 model, various modifications incl removable knee and lateral pads; puncture proof tyres; ventilator tray; front and rear lights. It has joystick control and carer control. Cost over £18,000 new with additions, asking £4,500 ono. It has not

been used in the past two years, and is in very good condition with battery charger included. Buyer collects Tel Pip: 07798 710679 (Surrey).

HOUSEHOLD & FAMILIES

ACORN DE LUXE stairlift, 151" right hand straight run with swivel chair and seatbelt. 2 remote controls. Dismantled, available for collection. £900 ono (includes delivery and fitting by a trained Acorn engineer and full 3 months' manufacturer's guarantee). Tel: 0800 0739793.

BATHMASTER XTRA

RECLINING bath lift. Fully powered self-contained bath seat, requires no plumbing or electrical installation. Folds compactly. Dismantled and ready for collection. With full instructions and brand new set of covers. £250 ono. Tel: 01527 832672 (Bromsgrove, Worcs), mobile: 07764 816069 or email: paul_baker@talktalk.net

BATHMASTER RECLINING

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HOLIDAYS

Disabled Access

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www.theukweb.com/disabledholidays or call 01274 588142

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Flights - Tenerife, Lanzarote, Malta, Crete, Cyprus, Majorca, Mainland Spain, Algarve, Egypt and Florida Holiday Homes in France

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Heated Indoor Swimming Pool & Private Games Room.

The ground floor has been especially adapted for disabled people and includes a double bedroom, single bedroom and wet room.

sleeps 3 (+1 cot) or the complete property sleeps 10 (+2 cots).

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The Grande Maison sleeps up to 10, the Petite Maison up to 5.

Contact Ed Passant on

01233 731097 or

ed@accessholidays.com

www.accessholidays.com

DN Deadline

March published

23 February.

Classified deadlines:

Booking: 2 February.

Copy: 4 February.

HOLIDAYS



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- 24-hour care & support
- CSCI registered

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backlash



It's a tall, tall world

Despite an absolute disbelief in omens, **Paul Carter** is beginning to wonder whether his middle name is really Damien

It's a good job I don't believe in omens. If I did I think I'd have already decided that I would be better off spending the next 12 months strapped to my bed, surviving by eating nothing but takeaway food that has been stuffed through my letterbox, preferably by someone wearing gloves.

This wouldn't be some overly melodramatic reaction to the fact that our wages will soon be worth less than the Zimbabwean dollar either, or even to hide away from hordes of knife wielding gits roaming the streets, I'd be doing it to protect me from myself.

You see, as I've mentioned before, I have a tendency to fall over occasionally. Now these gravitational excursions usually occur in the small hours after one too many tequilas, but also have a habit of occurring in far more mundane circumstances such as taking out the rubbish or over-exuberantly making the bed.

This was evidenced only too well by the fact that I managed to start 2009 in quite spectacular circumstances by sprawling



ALEXEY ROMANOV

into a flower bed, a whole five minutes after getting up and leaving the house on New Year's Day, leaving me decorated in large amounts of mud and sporting a very attractive cut on my arm.

“You see, as I've mentioned before, I have a tendency to fall over occasionally”

I then had to rush for a train back to London, on which I had to sit for over an hour, resembling the bedraggled victim of a fox hunt.

Despite not believing in omens and putting it firmly down to bad luck and residual drunkenness,

arriving back in the city did reinforce the notion that there are days when I think that the world is conspiring against small people like me.

I don't mean in a constant, 24-7, ubiquitous kind of way, but I'm convinced that there are actual days of the year set aside in a secret calendar somewhere that you can only access if you happen to be over five foot six.

Without wishing to regale you with the complete succession of mundane trivialities that combine to make up my life, I feel I need to fully illustrate my pain.

After being forced to stand up on the tube on my ride home came the rucksack. In my face. Now, using the tube regularly when you're at waist height

like me is fraught with danger at the best of times. I've come to accept that dodging elbows, inhaling noxious gases, and (pretending I'm) averting my eyes from embarrassingly located bodily parts all come with the territory. It's not ideal, but hey, it's either that or the bus, and that's even more terrifying. I finally got home looking and feeling like I'd just gone through an episode of *Countryfile* and that assault course at the end of the *Krypton Factor* in quick succession.

Still, home sweet home, I convinced myself that I was finally safe from the world, and could concentrate on putting my New Year's resolutions into practice. At which point I switched on the light, and the bulb blew. Which I couldn't reach to change. Fumbling in the dark, I then tripped over the step I have to keep in the hallway in order to reach the entry phone, getting mud and leaves onto the carpet in the process. I lay there in the dark, and told myself it was a good job I didn't believe in omens. Happy New Year.

Information
for disabled
people

Directgov

Advice that's
easy to find

Directgov

www.direct.gov.uk/disability

Directgov is the website to visit for the latest information and services from government. It's clearly written, useful and the information is all in one place.

There's a large section for disabled people covering:

- ▶ home and housing
- ▶ financial support
- ▶ disability rights
- ▶ employment
- ▶ health and support

Find out about equipment, adapting your home or vehicle, direct payments (arranging your own care and services), social care assessments, the Blue Badge parking scheme – including an interactive UK-wide map, travel and transport, accessible technology – and much more.

There's also information for carers and links to charities and helpful organisations supporting disabled people.

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Better for Style, Comfort & Quality

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'The staff at Lewis Reed helped me get the right vehicle. I felt comfortable for the 1st time, the conversion has a quality sturdy and comfortable feel to it. I would not hesitate to recommend Lewis Reed to anyone'.

Mr. & Mrs. H - Bolton

'From order to delivery Lewis Reed have been exceptional, and It goes without saying the Shuttle is excellent and we are over the moon with it'.

Mr. & Mrs. E - Bristol



Better for Choice, Service & Value

VW Caddy Maxi and Executive

Berlingo



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VW Caravelle



VW T5 Range



Toyota Hiace



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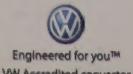
Better for You



'Our designers have produced a range of vehicles that look good, give great access and are easy to use. Customer care is now industry leading, as our customers often tell us. You choose from our extensive range and let us and our vehicles take care of you'.

Peter Scullion,
Managing Director

*Calls from UK landlines are free of charge, calls from mobile networks may incur additional charges, please check with your telephone provider for details.



Motability

